

There's Blood in your Web, Theseus (wipe it out)

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Archive Warnings:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings , Graphic Depictions Of Violence
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Relationships:	Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Clay Dream & GeorgeNotFound & Sapnap & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Ranboo & Toby Smith Tubbo & TommyInnit
Characters:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Toby Smith Tubbo , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF) , Alexis Quackity , Charlie Dalglish , Luke Punz , Grayson Purpled (Video Blogging RPF) , Cara CaptainPuffy , Sam Awesamdude , Foolish Gamers , Karl Jacobs , Eret (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu , Clay Dream's Sister Drista (Video Blogging RPF) , Badboyhalo - Character , Skeppy - Character , Antfrost (Video Blogging RPF) , Floris Fundy
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Series:	Part 4 of Writing about Block People :) , Part 1 of spider versus web
Collections:	Dream SMP fics that butter my bread , pumpkin's picks , mmm favs , Yumi treasure box , It WAS meant to be fuckers , Found family to make me feel something , Dsmf fics , SBI superheroes/powers au my beloved , Fics that absolutely RUINED me , Good Reads , Sbi to warm the soul , thinksmoon's collection of best sbi fics , Favourites , Found family sbi has my <3 , Sbi bamf fics that just <3 (and some angst of course) , Mostly

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There's Blood in your Web, Theseus (wipe it out)

by [spookyserpent](#)

Summary

Spiders are both overlooked and feared. They spin their webs, catch their kills and move on. Some hunt, finding their prey and stalking until the kill.

Tommy's not a Huntsman Spider anymore, though. He made sure of that when the skies bled black with smoke and the horizon was stained with orange and red.

From a class of twenty-eight to a class of one.

Or, Tommy has escaped the Red Room, only to stumble into the lives of a family of Villains, who want him to join their ranks, a corrupt businessman and his makeshift family and a bunch of Heroes, who swear they want to help him.

Now with a Sequel: Come in from the Cold, Huntsman.

Notes

I'm back with Black Widow Brain Rot but DSMP :)

BEFORE READING:

- So, as the tags mention: this is Dark. I will include trigger warnings at the start of the chapters like I do my other fics (check them out ;) please) but sometimes I miss things so Be Careful <3
- Tommy in this is sixteen and in the flashback scenes, he is younger than sixteen
- This follows some of the Black Widow Training and so includes children fighting one another and children dying by each other's hands. I'm trying to limit that but it is mentioned
- It isn't all dark, just mostly Tommy's past

For this chapter:

TW// mentions of hallucinations, scar mention, mentions of child death, gun and knife mention, brainwashing mention, referenced child abuse, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

There is a woman, with hair as black as the abyss and eyes like shining stars. His memories of her are light, ones that wisps are thin and hard to grasp, floating away before he can grab at them but he does remember being held by her, having her hands in his hair.

She tells him that he is her son and that he is her best creation so far.

He does not remember his father, or any sibling (apart from Dream, but when he thinks too hard about his brother, the memories begin to fade) but he remembers his mother's kind smile.

"No," Tommy whispers into the mirror, hands shaking on the porcelain of the sink, "that's not quite right."

There is a woman and she raises a cold hand to his cheek, wiping the blood from his split lip. There's a darkness to her eyes, one that matches the colour of hair.

She tells him that he is the best of his class and that he is her best creation so far.

He doesn't remember the boy's name on the floor, or if he's even breathing, but he remembers her maniacal, almost hungry smile.

"Stop," Tommy shudders, blinking away the haze from his mind. His fingers are almost as white as the sink from how hard he's gripping the sink and he cautiously uncurls them, watching blood rush through blue veins. "It's not real. It's not real."

Something in his mind twists. It sounds like Dream's laugh. When he looks up, back to the mirror, he's standing at his shoulder, green eyes filled with mirth as he flips his dagger. The scar across his face - from eyebrow, across the bridge of a straight nose, to cheek - looks crimson in the bathroom's terrible lighting.

"How do you know it wasn't real, little spider?" Dream asks, voice light and soft. "Am I not real?"

Tommy closes his eyes, shudders at the term of endearment, shakes his head, fingers curling to grip the sink. "No. You're not."

When he blinks open his eyes, he's alone in the bathroom, no sign of a green hoodie anywhere. Tommy once again uncurls his fingers, tries to regulate his breathing.

Looking at himself now, his blue eyes are dull, washed out and the bags under said eyes are nearly black. He would have another shower, try and somehow wake himself back up from that horrid dream but the water pressure and freezing temperature is almost as bad as the Room's.

He swallows, shakes his head. He's free from them. He doesn't have to think of that anymore.

But as he pulls away from the sink, sleep shirt sticking to his back from the sweat, he can't help but wonder if he made the right choice-

He catches himself, nearly laughs.

Choice. God, how long has it been since he had that?

He slips from the bathroom, switching off the yellow lights and walks across the cold wooden floor to his single bed, pushed into the wall. He rolls his eyes. Hands grab at the gun under his pillow and he shifts so his body is curled up protectively.

Did he ever have the ability to choose? Or was that something else stolen from him since birth?

Snowflakes flutter atop his blond curls as he walks to his nightly nine to five. Snow crunches under his feet and yet he does not shiver. That was something beaten out of him, years ago in Siberia. The elements meant nothing against sheer force of will.

Tommy turns the corner and is met with blinding flashing lights. He winces, having not slept the night before, but he keeps going. He has things to do and people to see.

He tried the doing nothing route. He tried to be a normal everyday citizen. Six months and no murder or bloodshed or even minor crime. He got a job in a cafe - so maybe he faked his paperwork but that's the least of his problems - and served normal people and bought an apartment from his Swiss bank account and was normal.

He tried. He did.

But the nightmares only got worse and the insomnia is rather annoying when sleep is essential to keeping sharp. So here he is, convincing a businessman he's a street kid turned petty thief.

Less serving people and more crime.

He passes the flashing signs signifying the entrance to the casino - more like little nation considering it's also a shopping centre, hotel, nightclub, theme park and water park - and dodges the long line of eager people trying to enter.

Las Nevadas, Quackity's empire. According to the businessman, he has a couple more of scattered across not only America but also the world. Something about taking over the world through capitalism.

Tommy doesn't really care. He doesn't get paid enough to judge who's paying him. Even if he's slightly impressed that the man went from corrupt lawyer for the local crime ring - the Syndicate - to running his own nation worth billions.

In L'Manberg, Heroes and Villains fight shading each other night and day. The Heroes Committee, with Captain Puffy as the number one hero, tries to stop the crime rings, tries to limit the Syndicate's power but crime has always paid more.

Tommy slips in through the side door, thankful for the lack of metal detectors and makes his way through the worker's back doors. He hates dealing with crowds - too many possibilities, too many variables he can't calculate quick enough - and so sticks to these walkways to avoid them.

Down the hall, he spots Charlie leaning his head around a door, glasses sliding down his face as his fingers keep slipping through the wooden door. Intangibility can be dangerous in a fight, Tommy thinks, rubbing at the bone in his right wrist, remembering his own fight years back.

Not that he considers Charlie a threat. The man rarely pays attention to his surroundings so getting the jump on him would be easy.

It's why Tommy makes it close enough to touch and Charlie is still none the wiser. It isn't until Tommy coughs that the man jumps and then slips through the floor, body turning see-through.

Tommy watches him go and then swings his head around the door to find Quackity in his office, amusement on his face.

"Sneak up on him again?" Quackity asks, waving a hand to usher him in.

He sits behind a marble desk, walls white and ceilings high. His dark hair is hidden behind his signature beanie while the scar from eyebrow across eye to lip is startling obvious.

Tommy is always more cautious around people with scars. They prove that a person has lived through something that could be the worst day in their entire lives and has somehow survived.

Tommy would know. There's a reason he wears long sleeves.

"He's too easy." Tommy replies, smile tugging at his lips as he drops to sit on the comfortable chair in front of Quackity's desk. "Never fucking looks around."

Quackity snorts. "He'll learn eventually. How are you? Doing good? How's the apartment?"

Tommy leans back in faux relaxation, the gun in his waistband digging into his spine. "I'm good, the apartment's still standing. What's my next job?"

Quackity rolls his eyes, pushing forward to rest his head in his hands, elbows on his desk. "You worry me, kid, y'know that?"

"Worry doesn't pay my bills, Big Q," Tommy replies.

"See that- that is what I mean!" Quackity shouts, pointing at him. "Tommy, you're so eager to commit crime! Man, take a breather, maybe hang out at a pool or something. We have kid

friendly areas here.”

Tommy raises his eyebrows. “Aren’t you like two years older than me, dickhead? I don’t need kid-friendly shit.”

“What about school?” Quackity continues. “I swear I tried to find you some school to go to.”

Tommy groans. Quackity wouldn’t stop pushing, especially after their second meeting when he clearly tried to find Tommy’s background and come up empty handed.

Hell, Tommy didn’t even know his background.

“And how many times have I told you that I have a formal education. I’m eighteen.”

Quackity rolls his eyes. “If you’re eighteen then I’m married to the Angel of Death.”

“I’m married to the grind,” Tommy says and then leans forward, widening his eyes. “Please, Big Q. I’m bored and I can’t find a job anywhere else and I don’t want to be on the street again-“

“Okay, okay, Jesus Christ, fucking hell.” Quackity hisses, leaning back to open a drawer in his desk and pull out a picture of someone.

Tommy, a few weeks back, snuck in and rifled through his drawers and cabinets. He found a safe behind the large picture of a white dog, a plaque beside it naming the dog Rat. Inside the safe was a couple of guns, fake ID’s and stacks of money in all different currencies.

Tommy was ever so slightly impressed.

“I need you to steal his watch.” Quackity says and Tommy leans forward, studying the picture.

Tall, lean, brown curls and English Professor outfit. From where the photo has been taken, outside of a cafe, the man looks harmless. His eyes are amused as he speaks to a woman in an apron, pink hair tied up.

“Just his watch?” Tommy asks, confused and Quackity nods.

“Wilbur has been... dodging my calls. He used to be a street kid so be quick - like you normally are - and if he catches you-“

“I don’t know you. I’m just a poor boy looking for some quick cash.” Tommy replies, rolling his eyes. “Where and when?”

“He frequents that cafe on the main street in L’Manberg’s city centre Mondays to Thursdays. Punz couldn’t find any pattern but he’s normally early in the morning or early afternoon.”

Tommy nods, mind already coming up with ideas. “You’ll pay me the same?” He asks and Quackity smiles at him, softer than usual.

“Course. Bills and shit.”

Tommy smiles back and finds that it’s not forced. He likes Quackity, he’s an easy person to like. Sure, he’s a master manipulator when he wants to be but Tommy has been trained for any and all possibilities.

He rises from his seat. “I’ll be seeing you, Q.”

“Good luck, Tommy.”

Just as he turns for the door, Charlie appears, frown to his face. His eyes narrow at Tommy.

“Why’d you always make me do that, dude? It fucking sucks!”

Tommy laughs. Las Nevadas is going to make him soft at this rate because god, he likes Charlie, too.

“Make sure to check your fucking surroundings, man, and we wouldn’t get into these messes.”

Charlie pouts as Tommy walks away. “You’re mean.”

“And you’re a man.”

“So are you!”

Tommy pauses at the corner and gives Charlie a sharp grin. “But I’m cooler.”

With that, Charlie spluttering over his laughter as Quackity giggles in the background, Tommy makes his way out of Las Nevadas.

The chair sits, bolted to the floor, harsh metal in the all white room.

Theseus shivers but does not resist as he’s led into the room, two guards dressed in all grey either side of them, guns in holsters, faces hidden behind reflective glass.

To the side of him, the man shifts and says, “the ceremony is necessary for you to take your place in the world.”

Theseus shudders, mind falling blank as he collapses into the chair. Straight back, eyes forward, hands on the chair’s arms.

“I have no place in the world,” he responds, voice monotone.

The man grins as Theseus is strapped down, electrodes placed on his temples. “Exactly.”

He hears the crackling of electricity, feels his body lurch. A burn, a twitch, a gasp.

Then nothing.

The café is quaint. Flower pots overflow at the edges, vines climbing around the sign stating in cursive: Niki's Bakery. It's all pastel and softness, delicate and unassuming.

Tommy is instantly tense. Places that look nice normally have something sinister going on underneath. He would know. The Room was something of a beauty despite all of the death.

Mahogany wood staircases, blood red rugs, pillars of white and thick wooden flooring. Gold lighting and high arches. Large windows and the beautiful black piano.

Tommy shakes his head. He's not there anymore.

With his baggy sweater and torn jeans, Tommy pulls his shoulders up to his ears and shoves his hands in his pockets. There's no gun today but he has a switchblade in his pocket and two throwing stars in his trainers.

Walking forward, he slowly pushes open the door and a bell chimes his entrance. From the counter, the woman with pink hair looks up from where she's placing cakes in the glass display. Tommy won't lie, he would gladly stuff his face with all of them.

"Hello!" The woman, he assumes is Niki, greets, waving with flour on her hands. She has a German accent. "I'm Niki. What can I do for you?"

He blinks and then slowly says, "I, uh, I saw some of the displays outside. I have four dollars so what can that get me?"

She smiles at him and begins to point. "Well, if you don't have any allergies, I have the pistachio brownies. I also have red velvet bites, some cookie dough balls and chocolate strawberries."

"Holy fuck, it all looks so good." He whispers, honesty lining his words and then slaps a hand over his mouth. "Fuck- I'm sorry, shit- oh I mean I don't mean to swear. I'm so--"

"No, please," she laughs at him, the sound is warm. Tommy wants to drown in it. "I don't normally have people complimenting my goods without even trying one."

"Seriously?" He asks. "They look amazing, Niki. I bet they taste fucking heavenly."

Niki's eyes crinkle. "What's your name, kid?"

"Tommy." He replies, easily handing out the name, knowing its as untraceable as his face.

"Well, Tommy, how about you try them and then give me your thoughts?"

Tommy grins. "That sounds like the best plan I've ever heard."

The first time Tommy ever tasted chocolate, he was twelve. The mission was to infiltrate a young boy's house and while there, the boy's mother had given him a bar of the stuff.

He remembers the way his eyes widened at the taste, thrown by something so sweet. The Room never gave out chocolate. His meals consisted of only the bare necessities, enough to keep him fit and growing.

He remembers leaving the house through the back door and scaling the fence to the alleyway, entering the car that waited on the curb.

He remembers picking at the blood under his nails, the taste of chocolate lingering in his mouth.

Tommy shakes his head as he accepts the offered bites of goodness. Each one has a distinct flavour and each is better than the rest.

Niki keeps laughing every time he groans at the taste of a new one. "Good?"

"Niki," he praises. "You are officially the second best woman in the world. These are the fucking best, fucking hell. I could die happily here."

She grins. "Who's the first best woman in the world?"

"The Queen." Tommy replies, chewing at the toffee brownie.

Niki laughs again and Tommy almost forgets why he's here. It's easy, in the warm lighting, under the gentle gaze of her eyes to forget that she's a mark, a target. Tommy isn't here to make friends. He's here to do a job.

He goes to open his mouth when she says, "Wil would love you."

He pauses. Quackity mentioned something about a Wilbur. "Wil?"

"Wilbur, my friend. He stops by the gush over my food."

So Punz does have the correct information about Wilbur frequenting this cafe. Tommy narrows his eyes playfully. "He sounds like a bitch. Only I can tell you how amazing your food is."

The bell chimes. Tommy freezes as a crisp voice asks, "who's a bitch?"

Tommy turns and is met with a tall (taller than Dream, definitely) man wearing a long, brown trench coat and thin glasses on the bridge of his nose. His hair is a brown mess that falls across his eyes and Tommy can just make out a flash of silver when he pulls his hands from his pockets.

"Are you Wilbur?" He asks and the man nods. Tommy grins. Target has been successfully sighted. "You're the bitch."

Wilbur's eyes widen considerably as Niki hides her laugh in her hand. "Excuse me?"

"You're excused." Tommy replies, cheekily and when Wilbur continues to stare, mouth opening and closing like a fish with no sound coming out, Tommy's grin widens. To Niki, he

says, “thank you for these.”

He pulls out his four dollars and hands them over, ignoring the way she tries to hand them back to him. He pushes away from the counter, towards Wilbur and brushes past him, leaning in to make sure he nudges at his feet, bumping his shoulder and jostling his elbow.

Under his breath, he whispers, “fucking lanky bastard.”

As he steps out from the cafe, bell chiming his exit, an expensive gold watch dangles from his fingertips. He smiles and makes his way to Las Nevadas for his pay check.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

We're back lads

TW// brainwashing mention, weapons mention, mention of rape and pedophilia but just the words, past abuse, death and killing mention, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fear curls up his throat as he wobbles, knives scraping at the wooden floor, causing a horrible screeching sound that echoes around the room. Some of the students flinch. They will not make it to their next assessment.

Theseus doesn't blink as he twists his body, lifting one leg to spin on the other. A plié to relevé. He pushes every thought away and focuses on keeping his balance.

If he falls, he will die. Those are the rules to this dance.

So he swallows the fear and completes his turn, staying upright as everything clenches to maintain the perfect posture.

He knows his female counterparts, the Black Widows, are trained much the same to the Huntsman although they focus more on ballet.

He can feel multiple sets of eyes on him: Dream, Sapnap and George; the woman with the black hair; the rest of his class; the teacher with the cut across his nose from when George was a student.

They are waiting for the inevitable. Either he will be allowed to stop or he will fall.

He is not Dream, he is not the best. He cannot feasibly keep this up. A pirouette to an arabesque. Knife-points are the hardest skill to master in ballet and yet he is here because he has potential.

That's all the woman with the black hair tells him, every time they meet.

"Theseus," she says, odd look to her eyes like she's hungry. "You have so much potential. Do not waste it."

A croisé. He spins and dips, titling precariously but staying up as the knives scrape the wood, leaving indents in their wake. There are more on the wood of students long graduated or long

dead.

He lasts another seventeen minutes before the teacher nods and he's allowed to grab the rope and drop down.

The woman grins at him as he removes the pointe shoes and the knives from his bloody feet.

Theseus counts it as a victory, even as his stomach twists.

Quackity is more than pleased. He's overjoyed in fact. Tommy gets the feeling he passed a test that used to be impossible.

It's funny. This is what he's trained for: the impossible.

They were taught about the Goddesses of Death and Creation, two parts to one whole. They were taught that once, long ago, the Goddess of Death was lonely and so found a mortal husband, bestowing him with a power that meant he was both dead and alive, a way to keep him going but also being able to see him without his heart stopping.

They were taught that the Goddess of Creation couldn't handle the betrayal and so she bestowed mortals with different abilities. The death of a relationship gave birth to magic.

But with these powers came too much responsibility. Criminals now had the abilities to blow up banks and fly over prison walls. Villains were born from the chaos but so were Heroes.

They trained to save the world, to protect against the Villains and fight for peace.

They were taught that they were soon-to-be Heroes. Hand-picked and born to a legacy of success. Huntsman Spiders, they were called in the plural. Each one of them a Huntsman after graduation.

Spiders are both overlooked and feared. They spin their webs, catch their kills and move on. Some hunt, finding their prey and stalking until the kill.

Tommy's not a Huntsman Spider anymore, though. He made sure of that when the skies bled black with smoke and the horizon was stained with orange and red.

From a class of twenty-eight to a class of one. Tommy survived only to destroy his legacy and the rest of their legacies.

Tommy's so lost trying to ignore the growing headache of repressing his memories, he doesn't even realise he's standing outside of the cafe again.

The light has dimmed considerably but the cafe still has that warm lighting, calling him in.

Tommy shouldn't be here. Every criminal knows that hitting a place twice doubles the stakes. Plus, Tommy isn't here to make friends.

He doesn't want friends. Friends are a weakness.

He remembers standing in the courtyard of the Room, watching as the new recruits set up their rifles, two figures tied to poles in the middle. They tried to sneak away together. They were caught. So they became target practice for the young ones.

It took five hits for the girl to fall, three for the boy.

To the rest of them watching, the intention was clear: friendship means death.

"Tommy?" A voice snaps him out of his haze and he startles, looking up to see Niki leaning her head out of the door. A bell chimes faintly. "Back for more of my desserts?"

He swallows. He's better than being snuck up on. Complacency is death. Friendship is death.

"I don't have any money." He says and she smiles at him.

"You don't need any. C'mon in." She holds the door wider for him and Tommy should walk away. He should leave before he even considers having an attachment.

But the desire for connection wins out.

Quackity and Charlie really are making him soft.

He smiles back, albeit hesitantly. "Do you have any more of those nut ones with the cinnamon?"

She nods and he follows her in.

Niki's bakery becomes part of Tommy's routine. Wake up from a nightmare, head down to Las Nevadas to ask for a job, get turned away (unless Quackity is really desperate), go to Niki's for a cup of tea and a cake and then head back to his apartment.

And when the nights get particularly rough, when the nightmares are too loud, Tommy changes into his Huntsman gear and heads out.

He doesn't know if he's a Villain or a Hero, mostly because his methods are less than to be desired.

The people Tommy find won't be going to any prison any time soon.

One thing he has learnt from his life as a Huntsman: everyone bleeds and dies the same. The rapists and the murderers and the pedophiles. He finds them - sometimes after some recon, sometimes he finds them by sheer luck - and then he shoots them.

He doesn't give them time to talk themselves out of it. He confirms his kill - always check for a body, for a pulse - and then he slips away like the spider he is.

His web is spun, the prey has flown into it and now they're twisted amongst thin fibres, he can move onto a new web.

Tommy doesn't find out their names. There's no point. His ledger is dripping red with the blood of the ones he's killed.

There is something cathartic about it, though. The methodical nature of the hunt. The way in which he must stalk until they slip up. The weight of the gun in his hand, the break between heartbeats when he pulls the trigger, the smack of a body dropping dead to the ground.

On those nights, when he finally makes it back to his apartment, he sleeps without dreams.

It's also on one of these nights he encounters the Angel of Death.

He's climbing up a fire escape, away from where the man lays facedown in a puddle, unnaturally still in death, when the hair on the back of his neck rises. He flips himself up onto the roof and pulls his gun, hand steady and heart calm.

Across from him, on the adjacent roof, a man stands with golden hair, a plague mask on his face, hiding his identity. Behind him, two, giant black wings twitch before curling up at his back, the arch rising high above his head.

Tommy's hand tightens on the gun.

"So you're the one that's been cleaning up my streets." The man says and Tommy tilts his head, thankful for the mask covering his nose, mouth and jaw, the hood covering his eyes. Even if he's wearing contacts as a precaution.

"And you're the Angel of Death," he replies, letting his Russian accent through to disguise his English accent. "I have no issue with you."

The man hums, wings twitching at his accent. "Ah, but I have an issue with you. Killing on my streets--"

"He was raping his five year old daughter after beating his wife into a coma," Tommy spits, hand not wavering. "Would you let him live?"

"Shouldn't the court decide?" The man asks but his voice is strained and Tommy laughs at that, something vicious and broken.

"Like you go through fucking courts."

The man's wings flutter again and then he lets out his own chuckle. "You've got me there, mate. What's your name?"

It slips out before he can stop it, something about the authoritarian tone messing with his head. "Theseus."

Well, some of his contacts from the Room are definitely not going to like that one. At least it's somewhat untraceable, only the Russians will know that name. It's better that Huntsman

or Tommy.

“Theseus,” the man breathes and it sounds like he’s smiling. “So what am I going to do with your Theseus?”

Tommy knows it’s a rhetorical question but he still says, “let me go. Bullet holes would really mess those wings up.”

The man hums again. “I don’t think I can-“

Tommy pulls the trigger. Once, twice, thrice.

The man stumbles back but Tommy doesn’t wait to check the body. He’s heard stories about the number one Villain, the fact that he’s touched by death and so cannot die.

Tommy would rather not find out the consequences to his actions.

A shot to the chest, thigh and calf would normally incapacitate most. Tommy doesn’t want to find out if the Angel of Death works the same.

He sprints to the opposite end of the building and darts down the fire escape before weaving through alleys until he’s far away enough to catch his breath.

He waits, gun clenched to his chest, panting through his mask.

Five minutes pass and nothing. Ten and nothing. Twelve and Tommy finally moves.

He pushes his gun in its holster on his belt and makes his way back to his apartment, adrenaline burning through his veins.

In the morning, when the light wakes him, he’s surprised to find himself named on live television. Some anonymous tip about the name of the vigilante hunting down criminals.

Well, at least now Tommy knows the stories are true about the Angel of Death. He is difficult to kill.

“Little spider,” Dream says, voice low and Theseus resists the urge to twitch, his mind burning at the term of endearment.

“Dream,” George warns from where he’s laying beside Theseus. “Don’t.”

“He needs to learn to keep focused even when distracted.” Dream replies and Theseus tries to tune him out, keeping his eyes down the sight, finger on the trigger.

“Go and bother Sapnap. I’m sure he’s bored with the new recruits.” George says, not disagreeing with Dream’s statement. Dream shuffles behind them and then George hisses, “left foot.”

Theseus shifts the rifle and pulls the trigger. The gun jerks in his hand, a shot rings out even with the silencer and the woman down the sight collapses.

She's up the next second though, eyes frantically looking around.

"Right hand." George barks and Theseus aims, shoots.

He watches a puff of red explode from her hand. Out here, in the desert, there is no cover. She can't hide. Theseus should feel guilty, feel haunted about his actions.

He feels nothing.

"Left knee."

Theseus aims, shoots. The woman jerks, nearly falls but she's a Widow, she's trained like he is. They continue fighting until death.

"George, stop playing with your food." Dream mutters and George huffs.

"She's a traitor, Dream. You know what happens to traitors." George shifts, voice hard.

"Little spider," Dream says. "Neck."

Theseus hesitates for a brief moment. Dream isn't his Handler on this mission, he has no reason to follow his instructions. George is his Handler and he hasn't given him the go ahead.

But Dream is a lot crueler if Theseus doesn't listen whilst George's punishments are more quick and clean. There's also something in his mind that pauses, removes George from the Handler position and pushes Dream there.

Theseus aims, shoots. The woman falls, spluttering as red pours from her throat, hands staining crimson as she tries to push at the wound.

"Dream," George groans, annoyed. Dream just laughs in the background.

"You're just worried Theseus may end up being a better shot than you." Dream reaches down and Theseus finds his hair being ruffled. "Isn't that right, little spider?"

"Whatever you say, Dream." Theseus mumbles, relishing in the contact, mind burning.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? :)

Comments, kudos and interactions are very welcome and if you want to talk, my tumblr is:

@spookynatasha

Take care of yourselves!! <3 Thank you for your support!!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

We're back :)

TW// child death mention, blood and injury mention, past abuse, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Let me get this right,” Wilbur starts and Phil can already feel the migraine set in. “This random Russian guy - Theseus - shot you three times and then disappeared and he’s supposedly the one that’s been fucking up everyone?”

With Wilbur like this, back to the bookshelves, glasses on his nose and hair a mess, Phil feels like he’s being scolded by a teacher. There is an edge to his eyes though, one that promises pain to those who have injured his adoptive father.

Phil nods, sighing loudly as Technoblade prods at his healed leg. They all know they don’t have to worry considering Phil can’t die but if his son wishes to fuss, Phil isn’t going to stop him. “Yes, that’s what I said, mate.”

“Have you pissed off any Russians that we should know about?” Wilbur asks, voice aggressive and Phil really doesn’t want to have this conversation.

When he came home and pressed at his muscles until the bullets popped out, he hadn’t expected for Techno to appear with a terrified gaze. Phil doesn’t know how he forgot that his eldest can sense blood and gets very upset when it’s on the outside of one’s body.

He had let the pink-haired man sit with him, crimson eyes burning as the sinew and skin healed over.

“Wil, you’ve been in most of my meetings and if you haven’t, Techno’s there. Have you heard of any Russians I’ve pissed off?”

Wilbur narrows his eyes, opens his mouth but Techno beats him to it. “Do I need to find this guy?”

Phil shrugs. “Normally I’d say yes-“ Wilbur’s eyes narrow further, “-but he only shot when I told him I couldn’t let him go. Something tells me we’ll be seeing him soon.”

“Phil, dad, dadza, how could you ever-“

Techno looks at Phil and interrupts Wilbur, calmly asking, “what was it?”

Phil looks back and knows exactly what he means. Back when he found Techno and then Wilbur, and by extension Tubbo and Ranboo, he always said he involved himself in their lives because something tugged him in their direction.

As if she was directing him and he would never ignore her.

Something made him pay more attention to the boy in the illegal fight rings, pink hair braided close to his skull. Something made him send another look at the boy holding the too big guitar in his hands, words lulling the entire crowd into emptying their pockets.

“He sensed me,” Phil says, voice quiet as Wilbur falls silent. “I barely touched the roof when he had the gun pointed at me. He knew something was there.”

Wilbur runs a hand through his hair. “Super senses or something more?”

Techno looks at Phil and says, “I’m guessing something more.”

For a moment they’re all silent, evaluating Phil’s words on why he came home with three gunshot wounds and a tale about a man with a gun and a Russian accent. Techno had found the name Theseus more than interesting, muttering something about cliffs. He did always love mythology. It was ever so slightly ironic.

“If you encounter him,” Phil says, “be careful. Be very careful. His hand was steady and his aim was scarily accurate.”

“He shot you in the calf,” Wilbur mutters and then pauses. “Wait, did he know you would survive the chest hit?”

Phil stills. Theseus shot Phil once in the chest, then in the right thigh, then in the left calf as if preparing for Phil to get up. He shot as if to incapacitate him, to stop him from following.

Even as Phil thinks about it, something else doesn’t add up. The man made a joke about bullet holes in his wings yet never shot them, which would have definitely left Phil to never follow after him.

“He didn’t shoot my wings.” He whispers and realises that his boys have been taking between themselves while he zoned out.

“Phil,” Techno says. “We have more worrying things to consider like the fact this Theseus might believe the stories told about us.”

“No, but think about it. With that aim, he could’ve left me flightless, yet he shot my legs instead.”

Wilbur blinks. “You don’t honestly believe a man aiming for your heart has compassion because he didn’t shoot your wings?” When Phil doesn’t respond, Wilbur groans. “Oh my god, seriously?”

Phil points at him, threateningly. "I would like to remind you that you told me to walk into traffic--"

"You were being creepy and following me!" Wilbur snaps, crossing his arms over his chest, blowing curls from his eyes. "What was I suppose to think?"

"Wilbur," Techno interrupts as Wilbur takes a breath. "You're missing the biggest problem here with Phil's statement."

"Which is?" Wilbur hisses.

"That he referenced trying to adopt you even when you tried to kill him which means--"

"Oh, for fuck's sake," Wilbur breathes, eyes wide. "Phil, you're not considering offering this guy a place in this family?"

"For all we know, he's in his thirties." Techno grumbles. "How cringe."

Phil rolls his eyes. "I'm not going to offer him a place in our family but I would offer him a job. That aim? He'd be an amazing mercenary."

Wilbur and Techno share a look. "We don't want another brother," Wilbur threatens them sighs and leans back against the bookshelf. "But yes, we will be careful if we see him. Not like he can do much damage with our powers."

Phil smiles at him and then reaches for where Techno is still beside him, fingers curling at the back of Techno's neck. "That's all I ask."

Even as they move on - The Syndicate doesn't run itself unfortunately - Phil can't help but feel that same sensation tug him towards Theseus.

Something's off about him and Phil's determined to figure out what.

The birthday party is an audacious one, filled with bouncy castles and clowns, fire-breathers and the occasional celebrity.

Theseus doesn't have to fake the awe on his face as Sapnap leads him through the crowds. His hand is warm, a startling heat and Theseus briefly wonders what an eleven bed house is going to look like when it goes up in flames.

"The girl by the sweet stand," Sapnap murmurs and Theseus nods. "I'll be by the adult's table. You have ten minutes."

It takes seven.

It doesn't take much to lure her away from her family and up to her bedroom at the suggestion of seeing her dollhouse. He makes it quick and efficient, the mission brief

mentioning nothing about added torture or pain. The messy part comes after where he takes her pinky finger and leaves it by her body.

This is a message. A bloody one. A deadly one.

Theseus doesn't ask what about or who for, he assumes one of the parents but the higher ups haven't mentioned anything and Sapnap, who had the main brief, also told him the bare minimum. If his Handler doesn't think he should know, he's not going to be a nuisance and garner a punishment by unnecessarily asking.

He's by Sapnap's side at the eight minute mark and the man ruffles his hair on approach, scanning him for blood that won't be there.

"Had fun?" He asks and means, "have you completed your mission?"

"Yes." Theseus replies.

Sapnap nods. "Good."

They're already in the car, turning away from the house, when Sapnap presses something on a disposable cellphone. In the mirrors, orange flames greet them, Sapnap's eyes burning with the same fire.

Theseus watches for a few seconds more and then settles in for the long ride back.

It takes a week at Niki's bakery before Tommy stumbles across Wilbur again. He's pretty sure Niki is making him the unofficial taste tester, not that he'd ever refuse anything she offered him. His tastebuds have never been so happy.

During one of these sessions, he's mid-way through a cup of tea with a hint of honey - surprisingly good - when the man enters. He's swapped out the brown outfit for a yellow sweater and blue jeans, glasses nowhere in sight.

"Niki! It's been too- oh, you." Wilbur says, voice losing enthusiasm at the end when he spots Tommy.

Tommy won't lie. That does put a smile on his face. "Hey, bitch."

Wilbur rolls his eyes. "Hey, gremlin. Did you steal my watch?"

Tommy blinks at him, furrow to his brow. "Watch? Why the fuck would I want your shitty things?" Wilbur studies him for a moment but Tommy doesn't budge. He turns back to Niki with a pout. "Your friend is being mean. He's calling me a thief."

"Wil, be nice." Niki commands and Wilbur immediately starts spluttering.

"Hey! I didn't- I only- there wasn't-" Wilbur groans and then says, in a softer voice, "can I have an iced caramel latte, please?"

“Only if you apologise,” Tommy murmurs, big eyes up at Niki.

“I’m not fucking-“

“Wil.” Niki says, voice deadly and Wilbur gulps.

“I apologise for insinuating that you’re a thief, random child.” Wilbur says, voice honeyed.

Tommy narrows his eyes. “That’s big man Tommy to you, bitch.”

“Tommy, stop calling Wilbur a bitch.” Niki says, turning her back to start making Wilbur’s drink.

“But-“

“Tommy.”

He sighs and then looks to Wilbur with his angriest glare. “Fine. Wilbur’s not a bitch.”

Wilbur beams, cocking his hip to rest against the counter. “Thank you.”

“He’s a bastard.”

Wilbur sighs, smile dropping off his face in seconds. “I spoke too soon.”

Tommy resumes eating his cakes as Niki hands Wilbur his iced latte. Niki is his source of sweet goodness while his cupboards are packed with only the necessities.

He has pasta and rice and bread. Milk in the fridge. A couple of chicken breasts in his freezer and his fruit bowl is stacked high with apples and bananas.

In fact, his entire apartment is as basic as his cupboards. His bed is pushed against the wall, next to the fire escape window and his clothing rack is on opposite wall. He has one couch and a tiny television he only watches at night for the news.

He has his clothes and his food and there’s water in the taps. His apartment is littered with concealed weapons and his Huntsman gear is hidden underneath his couch.

That’s all he needs. Food, water, a bed and a place to keep up his fitness.

He pauses mid-bite. Maybe he should buy some paint. He has to fit in somehow.

“So, Tommy,” Wilbur starts speaking and Tommy turns his head to make eye contact. “Shouldn’t you be in school?”

“I’m eighteen.” Tommy says. “Don’t need school.”

Wilbur’s eye twitches. “You’re not eighteen.”

Tommy raises his eyebrows at the man. “Uh, it doesn’t seem like you’re holding my birth certificate so how the fuck would you know I’m not? This is real bitch - sorry, Niki -

behaviour.”

Tommy doesn't even know if he has a birth certificate. He assumes they burnt it the minute he set foot in the Room, that's if he wasn't already born there.

“Fine, you're eighteen, which is a complete lie.” Wilbur says and then leans forward. “Where are your parents?”

“Dead, asshole, thanks for the fucking reminder.” He snaps and normally, at this point, most people would stop their makeshift interrogation. They'd feel uncomfortable, embarrassed.

It seems Wilbur isn't most people. Instead of cowering back and apologising for a grief Tommy doesn't feel, Wilbur leans closer, eyes intrigued.

“So you're on your own, clearly younger than eighteen and no one from social services has come knocking?”

Tommy shrugs. “I'm eighteen, I doubt they give a shit. No one in the government does.”

And isn't that the biggest lie there is. Tommy is probably hot gossip in their shiny offices.

How did a sixteen year old recruit successfully torch the Room and get away with it?

Well, if ever asked, he would say that they fell victim to their own rules. They grew complacent.

Dream and Sapnap were always the scary ones. Sure, they could disguise themselves well enough to slip into society without being outed as a Huntsman but there was always something in their eyes or in their movements. Something was off, something dangerous that left normal people with their hair standing on edge. A predator, hunting.

George, on the other hand, looked harmless. Short and slim, clout goggles to help with this colourblindness that he only wore in the Room. He was calm and clearheaded, a little cold but he could slip into a crowd without anyone taking notice. He was underestimated. A wolf in sheep's clothing.

Tommy took after George. He slipped through the cracks. Made himself quiet and easy to teach, hid the image of something feral and uncontrollable inside of his skull.

Tommy was mouldable, malleable.

And then he burnt the place to the ground.

Something flickers in Wilbur's eyes and Niki ducks her head. Tommy tilts his head, trying to read what emotion when Wilbur's face falls blank again.

“So you're living alone?” He asks and Tommy frowns at him.

“You're been creepy. Do I need to call the police and say a creepy old man is trying to find out where I live-“

“I never said-“

“-and how many people are with me like a creep?” Tommy finishes and Wilbur just sighs.

“I feel like I need at least six coffees to deal with you.” Wilbur mutters.

Tommy’s eyes narrow. “Or you could fuck off and stop interrogating me?”

“So aggressive, gremlin. Why so aggressive?” Wilbur laughs.

Tommy would love to explain why, that he’s a child and yet he’s seen more than any child should and that opinions and choices were forbidden back in the Room. He’s loud and annoying and aggressive because he’s finally able to be. He doesn’t have to be a detached killer anymore.

Wilbur then grins at Niki, unaware of Tommy’s inner turmoil. “I think that’s my cue. Thanks for the coffee.”

He slips his hand into his pocket and pulls out twenty dollars. When she tries to bat his hand away, he shoves it into the tip jar with a smirk.

“Bye, Niki! Bye, insufferable child!” Wilbur calls as he leaves, bell chiming behind him.

Tommy turns back to Niki after flipping Wilbur off with his middle finger. “I thought you said he’d love me.”

Niki laughs, the sound warm and slightly terrifying as she turns, eyes sparking with knowledge, meaning he’s clearly missed something in their interaction. “Tommy,” she says, “he adores you.”

Tommy blinks. “Creep.”

That night, on his encrypted laptop, he types in Wilbur’s name and hunts him down. As the dark night gives way to day, Tommy’s fingers are numb but the pain is worthwhile.

Worthwhile even if he can’t find anything more than some paperwork. Employment, age and medical records don’t exist or at least, they’re buried so heavily even Tommy’s having difficulty finding them.

He has names, though, and names are important.

Wilbur Minecraft, formally Soot. Brother to Technoblade Minecraft, the eldest. Son to Philza Minecraft.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your comments, kudos and interactions!!

I hope you're enjoying it ;)

Take care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

This one is short so I'd thought to update twice in one day ;)

TW// child death mention, death mention, blood and injury, weaponry, past abuse, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The man stares at Theseus, elegant outfit fitting their body. This is a test, he knows. This is a test and if he fails, he dies.

The man reaches for him, a soft hand to his cheek, rings digging into his skin. Theseus does not lean in, even if his cheek starts to burn with the contact.

“What’s your name?” They ask.

“Theseus.” He replies.

The man hums. “I’m Eret. It’s nice to meet you, Theseus. You’re doing very well in the program.”

“Thank you.” He says.

Eret smiles at him. “I wish I didn’t have to make you do this so young but this is about loyalty, about faith.”

One of the guards pushes a gun in his hand. He learnt to shoot a couple of months ago.

With a hand to his cheek, Eret guides Theseus to a person tied to a stool, bag over their head. He doubts he will ever find out the person’s name.

“Are you fit to be a Huntsman, Theseus?” Eret asks, curiously, without venom.

Theseus gives himself a moment of hesitation. He then lifts his arm, takes the safety off, cocks the hammer and pulls the trigger, jerking with the recoil. A bang echoes in the room.

The person spasms and then slumps forward, collapsing to the wooden floor. Blood pools from their chest.

Eret claps. “Oh, you are, aren’t you?”

Theseus doesn't respond. He lets the gun hang limply from his hand as he stares at the red staining the wood.

This is the first time he's killed. This will not be the last.

The thing is, Tommy likes his nightly patrols. He can sleep once he returns and with his name now splashed across L'Manberg, the people begin to talk.

He is dangerous, they say, dangerous and the Heroes need to find him.

He is a saviour, the public coo, he protects us when the Heroes don't.

Suddenly, the police reports double with criminals for Tommy to hunt. He does so indiscriminately, quick and efficient, never one for torture.

Tommy only regrets telling the Angel of Death his name. He knows there are others out there who will hear Theseus and connect the dots: government officials, maybe even some of his contacts from his days in the Room.

Even then, what can they do to him that hasn't already been done?

If it causes trouble, he can always leave L'Manberg. It's not like he'll be missed. Maybe he'll even find a cabin in the woods, spend his days hunting and fishing.

He's sitting atop a building, flipping his blade (one of the ones from the Room, perfectly weighted and designed specifically for his hand) and mulling over his life decisions when the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. He's up in seconds, dagger slipping into his sleeve, gun falling from his hostler into his hand, arm raised at the figure.

It's the Angel of Death, wings flapping silently as he perches at the edge of the roof. There's metres between them but Tommy is as tense as ever.

He doesn't know if he could win a fight against the man before him.

"You're hard to find." The man says and Tommy remains silent, panicking but trying to keep his body calm. At his stillness, the man raises his palms in a surrender. "I'd rather not leave a roof like I did last time. Please, can we talk?"

"If I were to say no?" Tommy asks, Russian accent firmly in place.

The man tilts his head, his wings curling up at his back. "Then I can't stop you. Like I said, I'd rather not end up with a bullet in my sternum, mate."

Tommy's breathing slows. "How would I know that you wouldn't follow me?"

"Something tells me you'd know if I were," he says and Tommy can't sense a lie. Sure, the man's tells are hidden behind his plague mask but Tommy may have looked into bird wing behaviours and there's nothing suggesting that the man is going to attack.

Slowly, Tommy lets his arm lower. The safety is still off and if it came down to it, Tommy might be the quicker one when it comes to firing but he's showing he's willing to listen.

He's curious. Sue him.

"What do you want to talk about?"

His wings flutter and when he speaks, the Angel sounds like he's smiling, "I wanted to know why L'Manberg?"

Tommy frowns. "What do you mean?"

"You could've started killing anywhere and you choose here, why?"

Tommy pauses, shifts on his feet. So maybe he wasn't expecting that type of question. Maybe because he's never really thought about it.

After the Room, he just wanted to get as far away as possible. America seemed like the best option but L'Manberg has a history paved in blood and was founded on Heroes and Villains. It seemed like the perfect place to try and settle.

"I like the view." Tommy replies and the Angel snorts a laugh.

"Seriously?"

Tommy narrows his eyes. "Why did you choose here, then?"

The Angel also pauses and then runs a hand through his hair. "Ah, I realise my mistake."

Tommy snorts. "Anything else?"

The Angel takes a step closer. Tommy tenses, hand on the gun twitching. The Angel freezes in place. Tommy relaxes.

"Where in Russia are you from?"

Tommy nearly laughs. As if he would know.

Tommy has been told the story, of a family of workers, strong and fierce, seeing the governments need for soldiers and handing over their child selflessly.

His own memories remind him of the woman, dark hair and shining eyes like stars, warm laugh and always being held. A woman that came from the Room and will help the Room at all costs.

But even those are probably wrong. He does not know the reality.

The woman, in his memories, also has a sharp slap and a cold grip, a laugh that burns like the snow outside the Room.

For all he knows, Tommy was born into the Room, given to the Room or abandoned to it. Truth and deception does go hand in hand and Tommy's mind is a minefield of knowledge and memory and blankness, of triggers and emptiness.

He could be American for all he knows, even if he thinks his English accent suits him.

"Volgograd," he replies, knowing the original Room was in Belarus before Belarus left the USSR.

The problem with the location of the Room is that all knowledge about it is stripped from his mind. Tommy could make his way back easily, but the minute he tries to think about roads or towns or cities, his memories blur and fade, floating away quicker than he can grab them.

He remembers training in Siberia. He remembers meetings in Moscow. He's pretty sure Dream had an apartment in Saint Petersburg.

The Angel tilts his head, wings fluttering closer and Tommy sighs. "You know of Stalingrad?" Tommy says, exasperated and when the Angel nods, Tommy continues, "Volgograd was formally Stalingrad."

"Oh, they changed the name?" The Angel questions and Tommy wants to pinch the bridge of his nose until he gives himself a nosebleed.

Despite the annoyance at the lack of knowledge - Tommy gets it, he does but he was also trained to know places of the world so maybe that's just him - he does review the Angel's question. He spoke it like the passing of time is something that happens so quickly, he can barely keep up.

He also spoke it as if he was there when it was Stalingrad.

Tommy knows now that the man can't die, which begs the question: how long has he been alive for?

"For a while now, yes." Tommy says. "Where in England are you from?"

"Newcastle," he replies and Tommy hums.

Back when they were given aliases, Tommy had been from Nottinghamshire, George from London, Sapnap from Texas and Dream from Florida. All with new names, new identities even if George fought to keep his name.

"I-" Tommy says and then thinks it over, being more careful with information after his name was leaked to the press. The urge to tell this stranger about himself, about his brothers rises in his throat until he nearly chokes on it.

Wouldn't it be easier if there was someone who finally listened, who understood him?

He can't do it. He won't reveal more than needed. He changes tactics.

"You told the news about my name."

Wings twitch and bow slightly. “Yeah, sorry about that but it’s easier for my people to know-“

“I did not want to be named.” He says, voice hard. “Easier for you, not for me.”

The Angel tilts his head up and slowly says, “are you running from someone?”

It takes everything in him not to freeze. Training beats his body’s instincts. He keeps relaxed, keeps open, shoulders back and spine straight.

“Are you immortal?” Tommy fires back, Russian accent heavy on his tongue and unlike him, the Angel tenses quicker than a viper striking.

Tommy cocks his head, gripping the gun a little tighter. He may have overstepped to hide his own secret but his visceral reaction is worth it.

“May I leave?” Tommy asks when the silence stretches between them, the Angel clearly evaluating him.

“I told you. I’m not going to stop you.” His voice is strained, a little panicked but Tommy takes the opportunity presented to him.

“Thank you.” He says, stepping further back until his heel finds the edge of the roof. “I assume I will be seeing you again.”

With that, Tommy turns and falls, landing on the next rooftop and rolling away. He keeps his guard up, the gun without the safety on his hand, waiting.

True to his word, the Angel doesn’t follow him.

A punch, a kick. He grabs the sloppy throw and twists until he hears a snap. The boy gasps and Theseus pulls him in, kicking at his calves so the boy falls into his arms.

An arm around his throat, one securing the hold. He tightens, more snake than spider, ignoring the fingernails digging into his arms, drawing blood, until the boy falls limp.

He looks up to Dream. The man nods. Theseus snaps the boy’s neck and he falls from his arms to the wooden floor.

Theseus wipes the blood from his nose, using his hands to reset the bone. It hurts, it burns, but he does not flinch, does not whimper.

A Huntsman does not feel pain, they do not feel anything.

“Good,” Dream says, turns to where the rest of Theseus’ class watch from the sidelines.

“What was the mistake?”

“Pain.” One of them mutters and Dream nods.

“Huntsman do not feel pain,” Dream says.

“Huntsman do not feel anything,” Theseus and his class respond.

Dream smiles, then spins and punches Theseus square in the face. He shifts so that he doesn’t fall, head snapping back. Tears flood his eyes, blood pouring from his once again broken nose.

He straightens and looks to Dream, ignoring the flash of pain travelling throughout his face. He waits and Dream’s smile widens. He nods. Theseus corrects his nose again. Dream turns back to the class.

“Who’s next?”

Chapter End Notes

Trust me, bonding between them is coming ;)

Thank you for your comments, kudos and interactions!! Take care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Longer chapter lads ;)

TW// human trafficking, past abuse, brainwashing, injury and blood, weaponry, hallucinations, vomit mention, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So we’ve crossed Volgograd with early twenties to thirties men who moved to America and none of these people fit your description.” Tubbo comments, antenna flicking back and forth. His four wings are fluttering behind him, settling every couple of seconds before starting again. “Sorry, Phil, but I can’t find anything.”

Inside Tubbo and Ranboo’s house, it’s not what Phil ever expected. He always thought the boys would have a more chaotic design, each wall a different colour type deal.

Instead, the three-bed is filled with soft blues and greys. The windows are large, allowing the light to hit the furniture that is more comfort than necessity. With Tubbo’s garden outback, flowers spanning metres and Ranboo’s library, the house feels like a home.

Despite Phil’s house being right next door, he can’t help but enjoy being in the boys’ house. Something in him settles knowing they’re safe and comfortable here.

“Do you even have a solid description of Theseus?” Techno asks, pink hair pulled into a bun, strains falling across his face.

Phil shrugs. “He’s taller than me, slim, quick and he’s holding the gun in his right hand so right-handed. The mask covers his lower face and the hood covers his hair and eyes.”

“Are you even sure he’s Russian?” Ranboo asks, bicolour eyes curious as he slouches against the wall behind Tubbo. “I mean, Jack can easily mimic accents if he wants. What if this guy can do that?”

Something flickers in Wilbur’s eyes and before Phil can open his mouth to assure Ranboo that Theseus was definitely Russian, his face was being held by callused fingers. Playing guitar does that, it seems.

“Phil,” Wilbur breathes and there’s a hint of compulsion in his voice. “Favourite colour?”

“Green,” Phil replies and then pats his son’s hands, slowly pulling them away from his cheeks. “He didn’t compel me, Wil. I’ve lived with you long enough to know the signs.”

“Just checking,” Wilbur murmurs but there’s a fear in his eyes that makes Phil squeeze his hands tight.

“I’m more interested in the fact that he didn’t ask you any questions unless you asked one first.” Techno says, fingers playing with the strands of hair at his neck. “You opened a line of communication and yet he didn’t respond. Why?”

“He’s been very calm about things up until I asked about if he was running from someone,” Phil reminds him. “Then he asked if I was immortal. It was almost sarcastic, like he was mocking me for asking a rhetorical question.”

Tubbo pulls a leg up to his chest, head tilting to Ranboo. They share a look. “So he is running from someone,” Tubbo says, antennae twitching.

“Hence the accent,” Ranboo mutters.

Tubbo reaches over and pokes him. “Stop with the accent thing. We all know the likelihood of him being like you is slim.”

Phil watches Ranboo wince and then sigh. Ranboo’s past is a soft spot, especially with how little he remembers of it but Phil has made sure the boy has enough professionals available for any issue that arises.

Phil cares for his adoptive family. He will do everything in his power to protect them.

“His name is clearly a sore point,” Wilbur says, interrupting the poking war from the boys before them.

“It did get an emotion from him,” Phil agrees.

Wilbur turns to him. “He knows about you not being able to die and yet he does nothing about it?”

Techno snorts. “It’s almost like he doesn’t care.”

Silence and then they all spin to Techno, eyes wide.

“Oh my god,” Wilbur hisses. “He’s another Techno.”

“Heh?” Techno glares over at Wilbur. “Bruh, I care about things. I’m not some cold mercenary.”

“Tell that to your face,” Tubbo replies and when Techno shoots him the same glare, Tubbo sticks his tongue out at the man.

“I mean,” Ranboo says, coming to Tubbo’s defence. “I haven’t seen you smile before.”

“I’ve smiled!” Techno snaps and Wilbur scoffs.

“Yeah? When? Name a time and place.”

Techno pauses, clearly trying to think about it and Phil loses it, laughter leaving his lips in a rush. Techno glares at all of them. It should be intimidating but to Phil, this is his son. There’s nothing scary about him when it comes to the boy he raised.

“I hate you all.” Techno groans.

Wilbur grins. He reaches over to tug at Techno’s hair, laughing when Techno slaps his hand away. “Love you too, Tech.”

“So what now?” Tubbo says to Phil. “I can try the whole of Russia but that’s if he is even Russia like Ranboo keeps pointing out every five seconds.”

“Theseus is a Greek myth!” Ranboo hisses and Tubbo narrows his eyes at him.

“Don’t assume ethnicity based on names, Boo.” Tubbo replies in the same tone.

“I’m not- agh!” Ranboo throws his hands up into the air. “I agree with Techno. I hate you. I want a divorce.”

Tubbo tuts. “Then I’m taking the house.”

“Phil owns the house, Tubbo!”

“Mine, now.”

“You two are so chaotic,” Phil mutters.

“You say that like you don’t enjoy it,” Tubbo replies with a cheeky smile. “Who’s the one that saved your ass with the Captain? Who’s the one that keeps Quackity on our side?”

“Tubbo, you threatened to nuke his casino.” Wilbur reminds him. “You’re also the one that threatened to build a cookie business next door to bankrupt him.”

“The cookie outpost is a collective effort,” Ranboo murmurs.

“And the nukes?” Techno asks. “Because he’s still not forgiven me for the whole pickaxe-face-scar deal.”

“Mate,” Phil sighs and Wilbur starts giggling as Techno holds up a threatening finger.

“Heh? He tried to execute me! He was our lawyer and he wanted the death penalty for me! What was I supposed to do?”

“Not take a pickaxe to his face?” Ranboo says and then when Techno spins to face him, Ranboo shrugs, hunching to make himself smaller. “Never-mind.”

Really, Quackity has been one of Phil's best investments. After starting the Syndicate, running a crime family meant he needed someone to get him out of the politics and free from prisons - not that they could hope to hold him but the reputation of never setting foot in a cage is one he wishes to keep.

Quackity was a survivor and a smart one, threatening Phil back on their first meeting that he was getting his degree or Phil could kill him there and then.

Fast forward to now and Quackity has his own empire and helps to fuel the lucrative appeal of working with the Syndicate. Pay a few debts, help out the family and end up a billionaire.

"Tubbo," Phil says, hopefully ending this particular argument. He wasn't going to say Quackity deserved it but Techno had always hated slights against him, however small they may be. "Look into the whole of Russia. Somewhere, Theseus has existed. Any lead is a good one. As for the rest of you-"

"If we see him, be careful," Wilbur finishes, leaning over to pet at Phil's wings. "We know, dad, and we will be."

"You two might need to go out together, so that Ranboo can teleport you away from Theseus' trigger finger." Techno says and both boys frown at him.

"But-" Tubbo tries and Phil sighs.

"I agree with Techno." He looks at them and softens his eyes. "I don't want anything to happen to you."

Tubbo's wings flutter behind him. "I know you want to wait until we're eighteen but if you're that worried-"

"No." Phil says, voice firm. They all drop their gazes. "If he was that much of a threat, I wouldn't let you out of this house but I trust your judgment. So trust mine."

"I'll look out for him," Ranboo says and Phil nods.

"Good."

One way or another, they're finding this Theseus.

Theseus hates the chair. He hates it so much it burns inside of him even as he remains silent as he's led to it.

He's been told it's necessary. He cannot refuse, not if he wants to live.

The room is white and cold, he sits on the metal chair, allows himself to be strapped in. The guards leave the minute he's secured.

Soft music fills the room and he clenches his fists to stop the flinch. He shudders at the notes, remembers dancing to it.

Tchaikovsky's The Sleeping Beauty spills out and Theseus shuts his eyes, trying to relax his body. It's easier if he's calm. It doesn't hurt as much.

An intercom crackles to life. He waits.

"The Itsy Bitsy Spider climbed up the water spout," a woman coos and Theseus shudders, mind burning.

There's a modest house with a lawn, freshly mowed. Dream, his brother, plays soccer and always has Theseus' back-

No, that's not right.

"Down came the rain and washed the spider out."

There's a modest house with a lawn, freshly mowed. Clay, his brother, plays soccer and always has Tom's back.

Yes, that's right.

"Out came the sun and dried up all the rain."

The woman with the black hair smiles at them as they hunt, hunger in her gaze-

No, that's not right.

"So the Itsy Bitsy Spider," the woman continues, voice soft.

Clara, their mother, smiles at them as they play-fight, warmth in her gaze. They paint the perfect picture of a family that loves one another.

Yes, that's right.

"Climbed up the spout again." She finishes.

For a moment, the music floats in Theseus' ears. He's shaking, mind burning. Memories are deleted and written over, wisps falling between his fingertips. He does not resist.

The guards re-enter the room.

"Huntsman?" She asks in Russian over the intercom.

Theseus snaps back into his body. The memories that have been lost obviously aren't important. He will not mourn for something they say he doesn't need.

"Ready to comply."

Tommy honestly doesn't know how he ends up in these situations. He swears he has a curse. That would explain the Room, it would explain his entire childhood.

Before him, containers are filled with people. Most young women, but there's a variety, a few older women, a couple of children, a handful of young men.

For a second, as he stands among the dead bodies of the traffickers, he loses himself to his memories.

Of dark corridors and dancing en pointe. Of small meals and hard hits. Of Dream's laugh and Sapnap's smile and George's scoff. Of a gun in his hand and a knife to the ribs. Of sleeping with his hand cuffed to the bed frame and bones breaking under his fist.

Tommy stalks away from their terrified faces, to a row of bushes, removes his mask and promptly throws up his entire stomach contents. He retches, body shaking as he tries to calm the pounding of his heart, tries to calm his breathing.

He cannot break here. He will not break here.

Wiping his mouth, he winces as he tugs the mask back into place.

He has a job to do.

Turning back, the people inside immediately draw away, flinching from him. Something inside of him violently cracks. He knows their fear all too well.

Only then does he realise he's still holding his gun. Slipping it into his holster, he holds up his hands in a surrender.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he says, switching his accents completely to resemble a New Yorker. He doesn't want to panic them further with a Russian one. "I'm not with them. Obviously, or I wouldn't have shot them in the face."

They all continue to blink at him. With slow movements, he starts to rifle through the dead traffickers pockets until he finds a phone.

He dials nine-one-one and when the line clicks through, a woman asking for his business, he responds, "outside the Badlands, near the water, there are three containers filled with people, who I assume are being trafficked. There's also a couple of dead guys. Send help and food."

He doesn't wait for her response. He clicks off, throws the phone back at the dead man and turns to the groups before him.

Where the containers are placed, in a semi-circle, he's met with three groups of eyes. They watch him cautiously, more confused after hearing his phone call.

"I'm just going to sit over there," he says and steps back. "I swear, I'm not going to hurt any of you. I'll be gone the minute the cops are here."

He keeps stepping back until he's near one of the traffickers cars. He hops into the hood and takes out his gun, releasing the magazine and swapping it for a loaded one. The minute the action is complete, he places the gun back in his holster and leans back on his hands, watching out for flashing blue lights.

Slowly, the people start to exit. They're hesitant, watching him with terrified eyes but he doesn't move, doesn't even twitch.

He remembers a small box and three months of solitary. He remembers missions spent dealing with greedy hands and dark gazes. He remembers learning the art of dissociation to hide from the horror.

It only takes five minutes before the sound hits his ears. Sirens. Flashing blue lights. He's pulled from his thoughts and shifts to watch them approach.

They draw closer and he jumps from the hood, leaving the people behind. He'd rather not talk to any police of any kind. His missions normally revolved around exploiting corrupt individuals and he's seen Sapnap pay off police from a variety of countries.

He wanders through the Badlands districts, making his way back to his apartment. The industrial park is filled with warehouses - considering the port - and is the backbone to supporting L'Manberg's economy. It's mostly empty as he walks the dark streets but that might be because he's not close to any of the houses.

Past the warehouses, a forest sits. On the other side of that forest, the wealthiest part of L'Manberg stands. Tommy's pretty sure he's heard of a house filled with diamonds.

Why can't he ever patrol in the wealthy parts?

Tommy wonders what's hidden in some of these warehouses. He's been in more than enough that he assumes most Villains and criminals see warehouses as the best place for their operations.

Maybe it's because they're secluded and large enough to hide many illegal things inside of them-

He's being followed.

Keeping the same pace, he walks around one warehouse and across to another. It's quiet, almost too quiet but he can feel their stare, feels the weight of it.

There's not many places to run or hide and the forest is too far away to be good for a long term plan.

He won't interact until he has a getaway plan.

Then he spots the car park. A poisoned blade falls into his palm. He freezes where he stands.

"So," he calls in his New York accent, spinning in a slow circle. "Why are you following me?"

From behind a warehouse, a woman appears from the corner. Dressed in a long red coat, a red tuxedo and trousers, there's a red tricorne hat atop her white, curly hair. The Captain then. The number one Hero.

"You saved all of those people and yet left the minute the cops showed up," she states like it's obvious. "I wanted to see who does that."

Tommy raises an eyebrow. It's not like she'll be able to see it considering the hood. "I tend to stay away from cops when I've just shot a bunch of people."

She snorts, steps closer. He instinctively steps back. "Well, they were bad people."

"I'm still a murderer." She winces, he shrugs. "I am and I don't want to end up in a cell."

She studies him briefly and says, "was that a threat?"

He shrugs again. "Depends. Are you going to put me in a cell?"

The Captain laughs. Actually laughs. He tilts his head. What is it with L'Manberg and the strange people that reside here?

"No, like I said, those were bad people and you have a reputation anyway, Theseus."

He wills his body to stay relaxed. She takes a step closer, he steps back, blade digging into the material of his gloves.

"A reputation?" He asks. "I didn't realise that the Captain was so soft."

She smiles at him. "Just because I don't want to see you unmasked and in a cell, doesn't mean I'm soft."

"So can I leave?"

She looks at him, flicks her hand as her eyes turn red. Tommy's moving before she can blink.

The knife flies from his hand, through the air and into her shoulder. She staggers back and he's there, flipping her over his shoulder and to the ground.

For a moment, she struggles, eyes wide before the poison sets in, body falling lax.

"It lasts ten minutes," he tells her, plucking the blade from her shoulder, wincing at the blood. "No lasting effects. Just a quick paralytic. I don't want to hurt you."

He shifts her body to sit her up against the warehouse wall, hidden by the lack of light.

He smiles at her, even if she can't see it. "Sorry. It was nice meeting you, Captain."

With that, he turns and sprints. The car park is filled with plain cars and he still remembers the absolute tantrum George threw on a mission because Tommy hadn't yet been taught how to drive and George refused to.

The poor Austrian roads had to deal with a child behind the wheel while his elder - and Handler at the time - shouted how to drive while leaning half-way out of the vehicle with his sniper rifle, shooting at the police and the bodyguards of the mark they killed who were following them.

Twenty minutes later, he ditches the car in the parking lot of a Walmart's and makes his way to his apartment.

There's the lingering taste of bile in his mouth, his stomach twisting in knots. Those containers, those people have left him feeling raw, edges sharp and sore.

He knows leaving the Room wouldn't instantly heal him but he didn't think it would have its claws in him this deeply.

It's in the way he talks, in the way he walks. It's the memories of a family that might not have ever existed. It's the sleepless nights and the obsession with storing away food.

It's watching child movies and vomiting up his breakfast. It's flicking over book titles and remembering the harshness of the cover against his head. It's the soft pillows he can't use.

It's the emptiness in his rib cage, the yearning for someone to understand, to see his broken pieces and hold them together. It's not understanding people but understanding them too well.

Would Quackity help him? Would he accept his truth and not resent him? Would Niki offer a hug that he's starved to have? Would she be afraid? Would Wilbur turn him away? Would he despise the person he is?

Pain burns up his arm from his fingers. He blinks away the haze in his mind.

He's in the dark of his apartment, breathing heavily. There's a crack on the brick from where his fist made contact.

He sighs. Closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

"It's okay, little spider," Dream whispers from his mind and Tommy instinctively shudders. "I'm here. I won't leave you."

"I'm sorry," he whispers to his brother, even if it's only a figment of his subconscious.

"Don't be," Dream breathes. "You did what any Huntsman would: you survived."

"But did you?" Tommy asks, opening his eyes and when he looks over his shoulder, no one is there.

He takes off his Huntsman gear, looks up the Russian news. There's nothing about the Room. He looks for any criminal underground news that would circulate: nothing.

Out loud, he asks, "did you survive?"

Dream does not appear. Tommy hangs his head. Tears build in his eyes but he blinks them away. He will not cry for something he never had in the first place.

He takes a cold shower with the terrible water pressure and brushes his teeth. He climbs into his too-soft bed, grabs the glock under his pillow.

He does not sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I swear, bonding is coming soon :)

Thank you for your comments, kudos and interactions!! <3 You better be taking care of yourselves!!

Come talk to me if you want on my tumblr:
[@/spookynatasha](#)

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

The bonding, people, the bonding!!

TW// death mention, injury and blood, mentions of water-boarding, past abuse, mention of brainwashing, swearing

ENJOY!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Theseus pivots, rolls. His wrist burns, blood drips into his right eye, he's starting to lose sensation in his fingers, everything blurring together. He definitely has a concussion.

Sapnap lunges and Theseus flips, kicking Sapnap only to end up with George punching him in the cheek. He tumbles, quick to smack and dodge Dream's arms.

From above, Eret and the woman watch. This is one fight he will not, can not win. He is merely meant to last, to survive.

They have not told them to go easy, to not kill. If he is not at his best, he will die here.

His injuries are one disadvantage but also the fact that the three of them have been fighting together for years. Their movements are smooth and quick, familiarity in every breath, every twitch.

Sapnap grabs his arm, twists. He follows the movement so that it won't break, ends up tangled in Dream's arms. George aims a quick roundhouse kick to his chest.

Theseus wheezes, lurching forward as he coughs blood. He struggles, panicked and dazed.

Spiders and their webs. Everyone knows once caught, death soon follows.

Theseus will not die here.

Sapnap goes to punch him. Theseus falls limp. Sapnap ends up punching Dream in the chin. Arms locked around his waist briefly release and Theseus pushes forward, elbowing the man in the ribs.

He throws himself at George. Flipping him over his shoulder, he throat punches him. Dream kicks at him. Slipping under his leg, he grabs his other one and tugs, sending him crashing into Sapnap.

Darting up, he steps away as they rise, blood dripping from his lips. He drops his centre of gravity, spreading his feet to match his shoulder width. He raises his arms, curls his hands into fists in front of his bloody face.

A slow clap sounds. They all look up.

“Very good, Theseus,” Eret calls. Their lips spread into a wide grin, full of white teeth. The woman is silent but her smile is hungry. “Again.”

They turn back to each other. Theseus takes a deep breath.

Within a blink of an eye, the fight of his life continues.

Quackity takes one look at him and sends him away. When Tommy threatens bodily violence, he finally gets to meet the so-called mercenaries of this establishment.

“Punz, Purpled,” Quackity introduces. “Meet Tommy. Tommy, please let Punz and Purpled escort you from the premises so you can rest.”

“Big men like me don’t need rest,” he spits, ignoring the way his body longs for a flat surface in which to rest upon. Seriously, as the seconds tick by, Quackity’s desk is looking more and more comfortable.

Punz is the older one, Tommy assumes by the slight facial hair on his chin and cheeks. He’s stockier and two thick, gold chains hang from his neck. His blond hair is obscured by the white hoodie he wears but Tommy can make out the shape of a gun in his waistband, a dagger’s handle sticking from his boot.

Beside him, Purpled is the taller one, more lean. A large purple hoodie sits on him, along with black jeans but there’s a resemblance between the two. Especially when Tommy sees the blades in his boots.

“Gentlemen, please, let’s talk about this,” Tommy talks, knowing intrinsically that if he were to fight, they would not be able to stop him. “Let’s talk about women and drugs and my favourite woman: the Queen.”

Purpled’s lips twitch, Punz rolls his eyes. “C’mon,” Punz says. “Do as Q says.”

God, does Tommy want to fight. It would be so funny. He’d make it quick and mostly painless. It might even wake him up.

“I’ll tell Wilbur who picked his pocket.” Quackity says, when it’s clear Tommy isn’t moving.

He snaps his head around and gasps. “Betrayed by you? Ow. You’re no longer my friend, fucking asshole.”

Quackity leans forward, eyes wide. “We were friends?”

Tommy stands, glares at him while sticking his tongue out. “Not anymore, bitch. Next job I do, you’re paying me double.”

Then, with little dramatics bar tripping up Punz and getting a high-five from Purpled, Tommy is escorted from the premises.

Outside, in the cool morning air, Tommy watches as Purpled lingers and quickly says, “I’ll pay you five hundred if you can steal his stupid chain.”

Tommy raises his eyebrows. “Which one, big man?”

Purpled smirks. “A grand for both. You can even keep them.”

Tommy grins at him, holds out a hand. They shake on it. “Pleasure doing business with you, Purpled,” Tommy says as the boy disappears back inside.

He’s heard through Charlie that Punz did everything in his power to stop his younger brother following in his footsteps. Even then, Purpled - who’s around Tommy’s age, supposedly - decided to become a mercenary anyway.

Charlie mentioned how Punz constantly looks out for his brother, going to extreme lengths to keep him out of most of Quackity’s business. Charlie even mentioned the time Punz handcuffed Purpled to a radiator so he wouldn’t follow him.

Tommy is a little confused by that. He was never given the choice. He did the job, at any age, or he died. Simple.

He shakes his head and when he looks up from the ground, he freezes in place.

Niki’s Bakery. Vines curling around the sign, flower pots sitting by the door. Closed sticker on the glass.

Tommy runs a hand across his face. He’d rather not go back to his apartment.

Sure, it’s an upgrade from his room back in the Room. There, twenty-eight beds are laid out in rows, a single bathroom through the door on the left, the shower room to the right.

When he graduated, he was suppose to get his own room, like every Huntsman has. Like George’s down the hall as the oldest, then Dream’s next to his, then Sapnap’s.

Tommy never got the chance to see it.

A bell chimes. Tommy startles, snapping upright, hand twitching for his gun.

Niki’s face appears, concern burning in her eyes. “Tommy? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he says, words pouring out before he can even think about them.

Her frown deepens. “Why don’t you come in? I’ll make some hot chocolate.”

“I don’t have-“

She waves him away, ushers him through the door. “Free of charge service. What are you doing out there?”

“Just started walking, I guess,” he says, awkwardly. For someone who’s supposed to just be a target, he’s quickly warming up to Niki.

It should worry him. Friendship means complacency and complacency means death.

But Niki is easy to talk to. She’s kind and he hasn’t heard a lie fall from her lips yet.

And maybe he’s lonely. Maybe he’s reeling from the fact he’s probably never going to see Dream and George and Sapnap again. Maybe he misses that connection.

Niki gently pushes him into a booth, his back to the wall, door in sight. It soothes his brain to be hidden away. After he settles, crossing his arms on the table before him and dropping his head to rest there, she turns to the counter, the scent of chocolate filling the air.

Here, in the secluded safety of her bakery, he zones out. Exhaustion wears at him. He was trained to survive this, remembers the room with the flashing light and the chill, blinking awake and refusing to give in until they let him out.

She appears at his elbow, placing the mug down in front of him.

“Thank you,” he breathes, tilts his head to make eye contact.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” She asks and he shrugs.

“Didn’t sleep much last night. I’ll be fine.”

She hums, hearing the lie with ease. She doesn’t comment, though. Instead, she slowly reaches for his hand and squeezes. Warmth blooms there at the contact and he nearly cries at the sensation.

The Room forbid close relationships. Touch, unless of the violent kind, was also forbidden, even if Dream continuously ruffled his hair and Sapnap would hold his hand on missions.

“I’m here, okay?” She breathes, face open and soft, pink hair falling from her ponytail. “You don’t have to carry whatever you’re carrying alone.”

He blinks at her and with one last squeeze, she leaves him to go back to the counter, arranging cakes and bread. He swallows the whine in his throat, stares at his hand like it personally betrayed him.

Tommy doesn’t know how long he sits there. Eventually, he builds up the strength to sip at his drink, savouring the sweet taste with a smile.

Here, Tommy doesn’t have to be a Huntsman. He can just exist as Tommy, a teenager with a sweet tooth.

He drifts, mind faraway, something he learnt to do during painful lessons. His body is present and awake, ready to snap into action at a moments notice but his mind is amongst the trees, and the birds, and the soft whisper of water in a stream.

The mission had been a quiet one. He'd been dropped at the edge of a forest and told to find a cabin, the man inside was a traitor to the cause and so the sniper rifle on his back would come in handy. He'd trekked for hours until he found it.

And there, as he was setting up the rifle, he was able to drift. The soft bird calls, the water running a few metres away, the leaves and the trees and the bushes.

The mission was a success but he'd been successful in his own way: he learnt how to retreat when the days grew hard.

The bell chimes. Tommy snaps away from the forest.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news but I am on babysitting duty--"

Wilbur pauses at the sight of Tommy. Tommy, doesn't even bother to look annoyed. He lifts a hand and waves, taking note of the two people following Wilbur into the cafe.

A small boy, antennae on his head twitching, wings in his back fluttering. Tommy would guess he's a bee hybrid, the main tell being the black and yellow striped jumper he wears. He has a mop of brown hair falling over his eyes but there's a mischievous lift to his lips.

Beside him, a much, much taller boy stands, taller than Wilbur. He has bicoloured eyes and his hair is dyed white on one side, black on the other. A mask covers the bottom of his face, dark glasses hanging off of his t-shirt.

Tommy faintly remembers one of his classmates having heterochromia but he's pretty sure the boy died quickly early on. So early on, he doesn't even remember his name. He doesn't mourn.

"Tommy." Wilbur says. "I- aren't you closed closed, Niki?"

"I can let whoever I want in my bakery, Wil," she replies, voice hard and oh, is Niki scary? Tommy lets a smile grace his lips. He knew he liked her for a reason. "He can stay as long as he likes."

"But--"

"He stays." Niki repeats, dangerous edge to her tone. Tommy blinks. So there's definitely something happening here he's not aware of.

The two of them stare at one another, communicating with their eyes and facial expressions, the way Dream, Sapnap and George did. Whatever's going on, Wilbur isn't happy but he relents.

"We can talk in the back," she says, notably softer. "Ranboo, Tubbo, I've got your pastries here for you."

With that, she turns and pushes open a side-door, Wilbur following close behind after giving Tommy a lingering stare.

The boys move, too, and Tommy watches them curiously. Before any fight, it's always best to scope out the opposition.

Wilbur and the tall boy have the height advantage and the bee hybrid probably has the ability to fly and sting. Tommy has the training and the weaponry, that's if they don't.

One thing the Huntsman Spiders were taught that was crucial to survival: don't be cocky.

Even Dream, the best in the Room, could be taken down by George. He'd seen it, watched as George kept falling until Dream suddenly grinned, only to be thrown down, legs wrapped around his neck.

They collect their pastries and then pause by the counter. They share a look. The bee hybrid turns to Tommy.

"I'm Tubbo," he says. "This is Ranboo. Niki said your name was Tommy?"

Tommy nods. "Nice to meet you. Wilbur's a bitch."

Tubbo laughs, antennae twitching with humour. "Yeah, he is."

The tall one, Ranboo, looks up and waves. "Hi."

Unlike Tubbo's English accent, Ranboo is American. Tommy tilts his head, curious.

"You're a filthy America?" He asks and Tubbo laughs again.

"Uh," Ranboo mutters. "Not- not really? I mean, I think I'm English?"

Tommy sits up, frowning. "What the fuck does that mean?"

Tubbo slides into the booth opposite Tommy, pulling Ranboo beside him. The boy topples, catches himself and finally sits. Tommy can't hide his amused smile.

"Wilbur's dad, Phil, adopts." Tubbo explains. "Technoblade was the first, then Wilbur, then me. He found Ranboo on the streets of Russia and-"

"I had an English accent," Ranboo interrupts as Tommy perks up at the mention of his country. "So Phil thought I'd been abandoned, maybe. He doesn't know. The government - English and Russian - couldn't find any missing persons on me so Phil took me in."

"He stole Techno's accent." Tubbo grins. "Like a fucking mimic or something, didn't you, boss man?"

Ranboo rolls his eyes. "It's not my fault my child-like brain liked his voice."

“So this Technoblade is also a filthy American?” Tommy asks and then frowns. “Your family is weird.”

The two share a look. “Yeah, we know,” Ranboo mutters.

Tommy raises his eyebrows at that, intrigued. There’s something going on behind the scenes, that much is obvious. Tommy wonders how deep-

He shakes his head. These people aren’t marks, he doesn’t have to look into them or follow them. They are just people, nothing more, nothing less, going about their days.

He watches them eat their pastries when Tubbo mutters, “why is it called Niki’s Bakery when it’s a cafe?”

“Because it’s a bakery and a cafe but that title would be too long?” Ranboo offers.

Tubbo hums, the sound more like a buzz. “I suppose.”

“So,” Tommy says after a moment of silence. “How old are you two?”

“Sixteen,” Tubbo says, confidently.

“Sixteen?” Ranboo says, less confidently.

“Don’t sound sure there, Ranboob,” Tommy mutters and the boy hunches his shoulders, shooting him an affronted look.

“It’s Ranboo and I told you, there are no records of me so I don’t know if I am sixteen.”

Tommy frowns at him. “You’re really fucking strange, you know that, right?”

Ranboo nods. “Yeah.”

“Cool.”

“What about you?” Tubbo asks, wings fluttering behind him.

“Eighteen,” he says, because Wilbur could come though at any moment.

Tubbo leans forward as Ranboo blinks at him. “You’re not eighteen,” Tubbo says. “You’re, what, sixteen?”

“I’m eighteen, Tubso.”

“That’s such a fucking lie!”

“Are you calling me a liar, bee boy?” Tommy asks, tilting his head.

“He ain’t calling you a truther,” Ranboo mutters and Tommy stares at him, confused as Tubbo giggles.

Clearly he's missed a reference of some kind. It's not a surprise, the only media he's ever consumed is early Disney films to pick up accents. They never really watched films in the Room, it was seen as being lazy.

Tubbo seems to sense that he doesn't understand. "You've never seen Drake and Josh?"

Tommy blinks. "No."

A look crosses his eyes as he turns to Ranboo and then sends a blinding grin at Tommy. "Then you'll have to come and watch it with us."

"What?" Tommy breathes, thrown. He's not here to make friends. Friends mean complacency and complacency means death.

But Niki has yet to stab him in the back and Quackity has been nothing but kind.

He's tired, in all honesty. Tired of it all. Tired of constantly fighting for his life, of bleeding for a organisation that doesn't even care about him.

He never had a childhood, not like the ones he's seen in the TV shows the Room showed them. He didn't have a family, he didn't have friends. It was just him, and him alone, fighting to survive.

And sure, there are memories of the woman with black hair, cooing to him like a mother would; memories of Dream ruffling his hair and calling him his little brother. He remembers a modest house, clean but homely.

He doesn't know if it's a lie or truth, mind messed up from the drugs and the brainwashing.

He knows he's not normal, knows he can't grow attached to these people. Sooner or later, it will end and he will run, leaving them behind and he will survive.

"I'll make slushies," Tubbo says, looking to Ranboo. "Candyfloss or popcorn?"

"Both?" Ranboo replies and Tubbo nods, pleased.

"Both."

Tommy has heard of candyfloss and popcorn. He remembers when Dream took him to a festival for a mission, remembers seeing the clear bags filled with the brightly coloured candy but he's never had it.

"Tommy, thoughts?" Tubbo asks and Tommy shrugs.

"I-“ Tommy shouldn't be making friends. He shouldn't. Friendships are dangerous, people are dangerous. He's not spent months planning to be free from the hell of the Room only to end up dead because he finally decided to trust someone.

"We have a pool, well, Phil does," Ranboo adds. "If that's your thing. I'm not really fond of water."

Tommy remembers being young, his head held under the water until he stopped struggling. He remembers the salt in his throat, the tears burning his eyes, the gasps he released when they finally let him up for oxygen.

There's a reason he can hold his breath for longer than five minutes.

"And some really comfy couches. We're still trying to convince Phil to let us have underfloor heating." Tubbo murmurs before shooting Tommy a narrowed eyed look, antennae falling still. "If you say you want it, he might just let us."

"He's not going to be permanently living with us, Tubbo," Ranboo breathes.

Tubbo glares at him. "He could--"

"Who's permanently living with you?" Wilbur asks, pushing open the door and Tommy really must be exhausted if he's not hearing him approach. "Hopefully not Tommy."

Tommy flips him off but keeps quiet. He wants to sleep but sleep means nightmares and he can't quite grasp why these boys are so quick to allow him into their home. Why are they not more cautious about strangers?

"Tommy's never seen Drake and Josh," Ranboo says to Wilbur. "Tubbo suggested we show him."

Wilbur looks to Tommy. "Really?"

He shrugs. "I'm a busy man, bitch. Don't have time for shit like that."

Something unreadable flashes in Wilbur's eyes before he plasters on a grin. "By all means, let's educate you."

"Yes!" Tubbo grins, jumping up to rapidly start discussing popcorn flavours and the merits of having ice cream with jelly.

Tommy doesn't add his own opinion because he doesn't have one. What they're talking about, he's never experienced.

His childhood was of cold rooms and bloody feet, of harsh hits and Tchaikovsky's music over the speakers. He didn't have the opportunity to watch TV shows or films, didn't get to sleep in until noon, didn't get to form an opinion on which school subject was his favourite.

After bidding Niki a smile and wave goodbye, he follows Tubbo after the boy latches onto his wrist and pulls him along, Ranboo at one shoulder, speaking for him, Wilbur at the other shoulder. Like this, he should feel caged between them, should feel suffocated.

Instead, he feels calm.

"Are you okay?" Wilbur asks, lowly, Tubbo and Ranboo still chattering beside them.

Tommy shrugs. "M'tired."

Wilbur slowly reaches for his shoulder, a solid pressure that reminds Tommy so much of Dream, he nearly cries. "If you need anything, I know we only met, but you can talk to me."

Tommy wants to laugh. How could he ever discuss what he's been through without the reaction being fear or resentment? He's a coldblooded killer, forged from a legend to be a legend.

"Sure, big dubs," he breathes, following blindly but still somehow memorising the route.

God, he needs to sleep.

Theseus stands beside Dream, tugging at his sleeve, pouting up at him.

"C'mon," he groans, the unfamiliar accent strange on his tongue. "I wanna go home."

Dream shifts, tugging him into a side-hug as he turns away from the woman - scientist, it said on the mission brief - before them. "I told you, buddy, I lost my phone. I can't- I'm sorry, but I don't-"

"Um," the woman pipes up as Theseus tucks his head against Dream's chest, sniffing. "I have a phone you could use?"

Theseus feels Dream shrug. "I don't know our mom's number, I'm sorry. It's fine, she'll notice we're late and come soon."

"A couple hours," Theseus mumbles into Dream's shirt, loud enough for the woman to hear but low enough that it seems like he doesn't want her to. "You know how she gets on her medicine."

"Hush," Dream murmurs into his hair. "We'll be fine."

"I can- I can drive you, if you'd like?" She says, voice strained as she watches their performance.

"Oh, I don't know if we can accept," Dream replies, stoically. "Stranger danger and all that."

"I'm cold," Theseus whines and Dream hushes him again, pulling him closer. He doesn't have to act this part, the one where he hugs tightly back, longing for this affection.

"I insist," she says. "Please. I couldn't live with myself knowing you two would be out here, alone."

They take the ride. Theseus pulls on her sleeve, tugging her into the house at the promise of showing her his toy collection.

She does not make it out of that house alive.

Chapter End Notes

Little bit of benchtrio <3

Thank you all for your support!! Take care of yourselves!!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

More bonding and also some discussions ;)

TW// mention of brainwashing, weaponry, injury, brief mention of child death, past abuse, mention of past suicide attempt, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil doesn't know how Quackity was able to build an almost lifelike model of the Eiffel Tower in his Casino but he's certainly not going to judge him.

Leaning over the railing, hands linked in front of him, he looks over at the pool shaped like France and muffles a snort, wings flexing out behind him. As much as he loves his sons and would do anything for them, sometimes he is proud of himself for trusting in Quackity. The man certainly has taste.

By his shoulder, Techno stands, pink hair braided at the sides, tied into a ponytail. His boar's skull covers his face and his hand rests on the pommel of his sword.

It's unnecessary. Here, they can show themselves, but they both might be a little on edge.

Heels sound from the staircase and Phil instantly straightens as Captain Puffy appears, tricorne hat atop her white head. At her side, Trigger lingers, his gas mask covering the bottom of his face, green hair slicked back.

"Phil," she greets to his own plague mask.

"Puffy," he replies, taking note of the way she holds her arm. "I don't suppose this is about the wedding invites?"

Puffy laughs, tips her tricorne hat off her head. Phil unclasps his mask, wings curling up at his back.

"As much as I'm looking forward to Quackity's wedding, no, this doesn't involve them." She makes her way over to him, cocking a hip to lean against the railing. "Although I am intrigued by his missing fiancé."

Phil hums. "We looked into it but nothing came up. Whoever they were dating and subsequently proposed to, seems to be a ghost."

She eyes him meaningful. "There seems to be a lot of those."

His wings twitch. "And that means?"

"Theseus," she says, calmly, ignoring the way both Techno and him tense at the name. "He's a tricky one, isn't he?"

"What does that mean?" Techno asks, voice hard.

"You're not the only one with good intel." She replies, haughtily. "I know you've been meeting with him and until yesterday, none of the Heroes Committee had even seen him."

"What happened yesterday?" Phil asks, preparing for the worst.

If Theseus has killed a Hero, there is no way for Phil to try damage control. Not even Quackity could defend against that in a court.

"He stabbed Puffy in the shoulder with a poisoned dagger." Trigger says, smoke puffing from the mask. Phil freezes, blinks. He was right: Theseus is dangerous.

"Sam," Puffy warns and then runs a hand over her face. "Look, that's not the problem--"

"Not the problem- he stabbed you with a paralytic!" Sam snaps, stepping closer.

Phil darts a quick glance to Techno. Well, this isn't going to plan.

"No," she hisses. "It's not. The problem is, you said he was Russian."

Phil snaps his head around, feathers fluffing up in defence. "He is?"

She raises her eyebrows. "When he spoke to me, he was American."

Phil freezes, Techno's hand tightens on his sword.

"What," Phil says, slowly, mind buffering as his wings twitch in panic, "what do you mean he was American?"

"He sounded like he was born and raised in New York," she says, honest and straight forward. "If you don't believe me, you can read the reports of forty-eight victims he saved from a human trafficking ring."

Phil looks over to Techno. They both share the same thought: Ranboo was right, Theseus is using his accent to disguise himself.

It's smart, even if a little unnecessary considering he wears a mask. It appears Phil keeps underestimating this man.

"Human trafficking?" He finds himself asking instead.

She nods. "A shipment at the Badlands port. He called the police from one of the trafficker's phones, after killing them all - single shot to the forehead or chest - and then waited until the

police showed up before walking away. He sensed me before I even got there, called out to me.”

“He then threw a poisoned dagger at you.” Sam mutters and she sighs.

“Yes, that but he moved my body to hide me and told me that it would only be ten minutes. With that speed, that aim, he could’ve easily killed me.” She sends Sam a firm look. “He didn’t.”

“Just because he said he didn’t want to hurt you, doesn’t make him a good person, Puffy.” Sam snaps.

“No but it makes him interesting.” Puffy looks to Phil. “There’s something else.”

Phil steels himself. “Yes?”

“My powers didn’t work.”

They all tense as Sam hisses, smoke pouring from his mask, “you never mentioned that.”

“It didn’t seem relevant,” she replies, nonchalantly.

“Didn’t seem- oh my god.” Sam turns away, stalks over to the railing and drops his head onto the cool metal. Puffy reaches over to pat his back.

“Does any of this ring a bell to you?” She asks and Phil nods.

“I- when I encountered him, he was Russian, and he only attacked when backed into a corner. I haven’t tried my abilities on him for obvious reasons but if you can’t...” Phil trails off, looks to Techno.

His son turns away, hand slipping in his pocket to pull out his phone, quick to type out what Phil hopes is a message of worry and concern. It’s late morning so it’s unlikely any of his boys will be hurt but Wilbur is with Tubbo and Ranboo, off on a meeting with Niki to discuss business. He can’t have them hurt. Not if this man can resist even Puffy’s power level.

There’s a reason she’s the number one Hero.

“There’s a reason you didn’t tell the Committee,” he says and she nods.

“If I tell them, he’ll be hunted with a shoot to kill order.” She looks out at the pool, at the artificial landscape. “I have a feeling, if push comes to shove, he can be very dangerous if he feels threatened.”

“So why come to me?”

She gives him an exasperated stare. “Phil, you literally adopted two of the most powerful kids in the world simply because the government wanted to hide them away. You defied everyone and look, you’re not dead and neither is half the world.”

“Hey,” Techno rumbles, looking up from his phone. “Wilbur tried multiple times to take over the world and I was his willing accomplice. It wasn’t for a lack of trying.”

“Mate, Wilbur compelling half of the UK’s fucking military isn’t something to boast about,” Phil says with a laugh and Techno points at him.

“We took over Spain!”

“Briefly!” Phil shouts. “Still not something to boast about.”

Puffy throws her head back and laughs, Sam still resting with his head on the metal behind her. “That’s what I mean. If anyone can talk someone dangerous down, it’s you. Right now, he’s just a vigilante but the Committee is already asking for information about him, wanting to sway him.”

Phil suddenly understands. “I’m not competing with you other a random man.”

She narrows her eyes. “C’mon Phil, you see the potential, I bet you want him as much as I do. With that aim, that fearlessness: he’d be perfect on the streets. He’s already working his way through the criminals.”

“By killing them,” Sam mutters, darkly. “Let’s not forget that part considering we’re the Heroes here, Puffy.”

“Sam, Tubbo could commit a genocide and you’d still be fighting in his corner.” Puffy says and he rolls his eyes.

“Tubbo would never-“

“He has nuclear codes,” Techno interrupts. “He has access to actual nuclear weaponry.”

Sam lifts his head, pauses. “Okay so maybe I can excuse your intrigue for Theseus.”

Puffy scoffs, Techno snorts, Phil smiles.

“I’ll try to recruit him,” he says. “But that might take some time, he doesn’t seem to be the trusting type.”

“I’ve already informed most of the Heroes to not involve themselves, be careful out there.” She responds.

“The minute something changes with the Committee-“ Phil warns and she waves him off.

“I’ll inform you. I don’t want him dead.”

Phil reaches his hand out, she takes it and shakes. Even if they are on opposite sides, they’ll always be friends. A Hero and a Villain: two of the most powerful people on the planet.

There’s not a day that doesn’t go by when he doesn’t have resources searching for her missing son. He knows that on her desk back in her home, beside the photos of Foolish and

Drista, is one of her seconds old son in her arms.

He still remembers calling to congratulate her, only for her to plead for his help. While she was unconscious, her son was taken, never to be seen again.

All they know is a power cut happened and that a particular nurse on the security footage seen holding the baby did not work for the hospital.

He promised to find him but Phil isn't a psychic, he deals with death and nothing about the boy has ever been found.

"Look after yourself, Phil." She says and slips the hat back atop her curls. "Technoblade, please stop threatening the orphanage."

"Drista finds it funny," he replies, grin in his voice.

"She finds a lot of things funny, it doesn't mean you should encourage her."

Techno tilts his head and Phil knows he's rolling his eyes. He clasps the plague mask back behind his head.

"Be safe. Puffy, Sam." He nods his head they both nod in response, walking back down the Eiffel Tower.

They wait for a few moments before Techno and Phil share a look.

"I'm not letting the Committee get their hands on him," Phil says and Techno sighs.

"Figured as much." Techno steps to stand beside him, looking down. "Are you sure you're willing to risk everything?"

Phil looks at him. "Normally, no. Not just for talent. But it's that feeling, Tech, something about him makes me pay attention, makes me want to look after him."

"Bruh." Techno heaves a long sigh. "I trust your bird brain."

Phil laughs. "Good."

They turn, make their way down the stairs of the smaller Eiffel Tower. He'll take the stairs instead of flying, just to be close to his son.

"Oh," Techno says, half way down. "Wil's picked up a stray."

Phil furrows his brow. "What?"

"You know he mentioned that kid at Niki's? The one that he described as a feral raccoon? Tubbo and Ranboo seem to have made a friend." Techno shrugs, unbothered. "He'll be at their house."

“I may have bird brain but Tubbo has bee brain.” Phil says and Techno snorts, nearly tripping down the stairs.

Phil’s just glad that no one is around to see the infamous Angel of Death and the Blood God laughing and pushing each other like school children.

“Again,” the instructor says in Arabic.

“I have no place in the world.” Theseus replies in Arabic.

“I couldn’t hear you. Again.” She says in French.

“I have no place in the world.” He replies in French.

She takes a cane to his legs as he stands en pointe. He doesn’t flinch.

“Again,” she says in Mandarin.

“I have no place in the world.” He replies in Mandarin.

She slaps him. His head snaps to the side, tears springing to his eyes but not falling. He remains steady.

“Again,” she says in Spanish.

“I have no place in the world.” He replies in Spanish.

His legs burn, his head aches after being in the chair. He does not flinch, does not twitch.

Theseus is a Huntsman. He is made of stronger materials than bone and sinew. He is unbreakable. He is made of marble.

“Good,” she says in Hindi. “Down. Go and rest.”

He drops from en pointe and bows his head in respect to her. He sits beside his classmates, untying his pointe shoes, blood drips from his ruined toenails onto the wood.

The instructor surveys the students. In Russian, she commands, “next.”

Tubbo and Ranboo’s house is, in Tommy’s humble opinion, very nice. Large windows and larger array of plants and flowers, it’s a home he would not see on his nightly rounds. However, it does remind him of the ones he would sometimes see during missions.

Next to their three-bed, Tubbo points out Wilbur’s house.

It’s larger but the design is the same. Tommy spots a handful of security cameras. Even in this gated community, it seems their family is overly cautious.

Absentmindedly, Tommy tries to plot a way in as Wilbur checks his phone and hums at what he reads. Tommy doesn't bother trying to look.

He could hack the feed but that could alert them. He could scale the building around the back, enter through one of the skylights. Or, he could do what he's doing now: be invited in.

It's always easier when he's invited in, less messy.

Wilbur follows them in as Tubbo leads him from a kitchen to a living room, down into a basement redesigned as a home movie theatre. Tommy's on edge, the fear of being led further away from the exits making him more and more anxious.

It eases somewhat when Ranboo and Tubbo show him the giant room and then disappear to make their proposed snacks and slushies. Alone with Wilbur, Tommy places himself in a chair where he can see the door at all times.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Wilbur asks, sitting a little way away.

Tommy shrugs. "I told you, I'm tired. Nothing a good nights rest won't fix."

Wilbur shifts, bringing his knee up to rest his elbow on. He then drops his head in his hand, studying Tommy.

"It must be difficult living alone. How do you pay your bills?"

Tommy thinks of his Swiss bank account, of Quackity's generosity in paying Tommy more than needed.

"I'm a waiter." He says, because he was. "Stop worrying, bitch. You're going to end up with wrinkles and they'll make you even uglier."

Wilbur scoffs but he seems to tell that Tommy's heart isn't in the insults he dishes out. "I just want to know if I can help, in some way."

"I'm not a fucking charity case." Tommy snaps, bristling at Wilbur's words. "I can look after myself."

He's been doing it for a while now. The Room taught them that self-reliance is a gift. Being able to complete things alone, not needing anything, being independent was the way of a Huntsman.

"I can see that," Wilbur says, placating him. "I'm simply saying you don't have to do any of this alone."

Tommy raises his eyebrows. "I've literally spoken to you three times and now you're, what, asking me to trust you?"

Wilbur grins at him. "I'm good at keeping secrets."

"If you have to say that, you're not." Tommy replies and Wilbur rolls his eyes, leaning back.

Tommy knows that secrets have to be kept in the recesses of his own mind.

He still remembers a boy from his class, trusting one of the others with some form of information, remembers hearing their low murmurs. Tommy never found out what but he did witness the boy get used as target practice.

“For a child-“ Wilbur begins and Tommy sighs.

“I’m eighteen.”

“-you’re so cynical.” Wilbur finishes. “I look at your face and see a child but your eyes... they’re so old.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy snaps, defensive, trying to ignore that his cover might already be blown because of something he can’t control. Is there a way to make his eyes less of a window into his decaying soul? “You’re old.”

Wilbur ignores him. “You remind me so much of my older brother, Techno. It’s like you’ve seen a war and came out the other side changed.”

Tommy frowns at him. Inside, he’s screaming. How did this happen? How is Wilbur reading him like an open book when he’s suppose to be portraying a normal, street kid?

“You’re really fucking weird,” Tommy says.

Wilbur smiles at him. “It’s the theatre kid in me.”

Tommy blinks. “What’s that?”

“A theatre kid?” Wilbur asks and his mouth twists like he’s about to mock Tommy, only to then see the honesty in the boy’s eyes. “You’ve never heard it on Tumblr or Twitter or whatever social media you have?”

Tommy looks away. “I don’t have any social media.”

He’s a Huntsman running from the government. Having a social media account is like him finding the tracker he ditched in Ukraine and inserting it back in his hip.

Wilbur looks completely thrown. He blinks at Tommy, mouth opening and closing before an incredulous expression filters onto his face.

“What kid doesn’t have social media?” He breathes. “What phone do you have?”

Tommy frowns at him. He can’t exactly show him the burner he has on him in case of emergencies so he settles for saying, “don’t have one, big man.”

Wilbur stares at him like he’s grown a second head. “What?” He whispers.

Tommy shrugs. “Don’t have a phone, do I? Don’t need one.”

Wilbur continues to stare at him. Something like rage builds up in Tommy, burning him. It's like the chair all over again, the electricity attacking his nerves.

It's not Tommy's fault he has all these horrid thoughts. It's not his fault he has to constantly look for exits, the way he watches everyone like they're an enemy, like they're a mark. It's not his fault he doesn't have a phone.

"Stop fucking looking at me like that," he snaps, let's some of the Huntsman bleed across his face, barely keeping the Russian from his voice.

Wilbur jerks back and dark satisfaction fills Tommy. He schools his expression, looks away from him.

"What happened to you?" Wilbur asks, quietly and Tommy keeps his gaze away. He can't force himself to look, to show Wilbur something he shouldn't be able to see.

Tommy doesn't want to be here. Tommy didn't sign up for this. He went to Niki's blindly and was led on by his strange need for connection.

How can Tommy ever explain that one? Hell, he doesn't even know what truly happened to him. So many memories have been deleted, have been written over.

He's an amalgamation of self-preservation and training. He's a killer, born and bred.

"What does it matter?" He replies, finally, voice dark. "Can't change it, can I? Just have to keep living despite it."

It's not like he can end his life. The training was hard and some students are the breakable type. Even if commanded to, he cannot physically kill himself.

He would know. After month three, free from the Room, he placed a loaded gun to his temple and tried to pull the trigger. Look where that got him.

Wilbur lets out a quiet gasp. Tommy looks up and is met with his wide eyes. He opens his mouth, only for Tubbo and Ranboo to crash through the doors.

Tommy startles, schooling his face as Tubbo juggles three bowls of popcorn and Ranboo carries more. The scent hits Tommy's first and he tunes into their conversation, surveying the bowls as if they could be poisoned, ignoring Wilbur's stare.

For all he knows, they could be poisoned.

"-know if you liked any," Tubbo continues. "Ranboo suggested we try-"

"The chocolate coated ones," Ranboo says.

"-yeah, the chocolate coated ones." Tubbo grins at Tommy before frowning. "You're not allergic to anything are you?"

Tommy shakes his head. He remembers the first to fall in their class of twenty-eight and be swapped out for another boy and it was because of a peanut allergy.

Not only that, the Room used to poison their food regularly. They learnt to fight intoxicated, learnt to handle high dosages of most drugs and alcohols and poisons.

“Good!” Tubbo grins and then spins on his heel, wings fluttering as he seems to fly with every step. “Slushies! What flavour?”

“We have them all,” Ranboo adds.

Tommy makes eye contact with Wilbur. “What would you have?”

Wilbur swallows but doesn’t break his gaze. “Bubblegum.”

Tommy smiles, allowing Wilbur to see the falsity of it, of the tiredness to his eyes. “Bubblegum it is, Tubso.”

As Tubbo disappears out of the room, Ranboo turns to Tommy, settling beside him, mask still covering his face. “You don’t have to watch Drake and Josh if you don’t want to. I’m sure we could watch a film instead.”

“I don’t think he’s going to like Cinderella or Snow White, Boo,” Wilbur mutters and Tommy freezes.

“Yeah,” he says, voice weak. He clears his throat and tries again. “Yeah, I’d rather not watch them.”

“Oh?” Ranboo asks, prompting him to explain further.

“It’s boring, innit,” is all he says. All he can say.

He’d rather not discuss sitting in that room, projector showing the old Disney reruns, mouthing along until their Russian accent faded into an American one.

Tubbo thankfully appears, glasses in hand. Tommy turns to the screen before him, trying to calm his racing heart.

Chapter End Notes

See? Bonding.

Sooner or later, the child in Tommy is going to fight against the Huntsman inside of him. He just needs connection :)

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions! Take care of yourselves... that’s a threat <3

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

I'm backkkkkkk with bonding :)

TW// blood and injury, weaponry, past abuse, past brainwashing, child death, hallucinations, vomit mention, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy stays for four hours. By the second hour, Wilbur looks to his phone and bids them a goodbye.

Tommy leaves because if he stays curled up on that couch, blanket over him, he will pass out in an unknown location surrounded by strangers.

He doesn't remember walking back to his apartment. He doesn't remember climbing the stairs or opening the door. He doesn't remember locking it behind him. All he remembers is falling forward, gripping the gun under his pillow and promptly going unconscious.

Then, as if only seconds have passed, he wakes to see it's dark out.

He's simply thankful he didn't have any dreams.

After eating two bananas and a couple of slices of bread, he chugs two glasses of water and brushes his teeth.

He won't be sleeping for the rest of the night, that much is clear by the restless energy in his limbs so he pulls his Huntsman gear on and heads out.

It's cold and Tommy wonders if it's going to snow again. He doesn't mind the snow, despite its chill. It reminds him of the Room, but not in the way it hurts.

Sure, the extremes were used against them. Tommy remembers fighting for his life amongst the white of Siberia but there's something soothing about snow. It's quiet and open, white, like the colour of his hands before he picked up a gun.

Now they're red. Everything about him is red. It's a colour he can't escape. It haunts him, in his dreams, in his memories, in the final moments of the Room.

There's a reason it's called the Red Room.

He shakes his head, focuses on the cold. Skipping over buildings and slipping through alleyways, L'Manberg appears to be quiet tonight.

Tommy's immediately on edge.

The only time areas fall quiet is when a predator is lurking around the corner.

And Tommy is a spider: quiet, unassuming, quick. He has been trained to not alert his surroundings to danger.

He's in eyeshot of the Hero's skyscraper when it hits him like a trunk. His senses immediately go into overdrive as fear floods his system. Heart loud and lungs expanding, he struggles to stay upright.

Bile rises in his throat as he hears the distinct sound of someone landing behind him. He spins, gun in hand and eyes wide.

Despite it all, his hand remains steady.

The fear is strange as he surveys the person before him. It feels wrong. It feels artificial.

Tommy knows fear more than he knows love. He knows what it's like to spend every waking moment waiting for a mistake to happen, waiting for a gun against his head, a knife to his ribs, a hand around his throat.

He spent his entire life knowing one wrong move would send him to an early grave. He knows fear and he knows how to ignore it. Huntsman Spiders do not feel, after all, and a rogue emotion can ruin a mission.

Tommy swallows his nausea and shakes the fear off. It is not his own. It is useless to him.

And then he finally realises why the fear feels wrong.

Before him, the Blood God stands, in a royal attire, blood red cape swaying in the breeze, crown atop pink hair and boar's mask covering his face. Tommy has heard the rumours of the man's ability, that he can induce mind-melting fear, rendering his opponents unconscious. Along with the fact he can supposedly blood-bend.

Tommy would rather keep all of his blood where it is. He levels the gun at the Blood God's chest.

"Blood God," he greets, Russian accent coating his words. "I'd rather not shoot you on a roof so close to the Heroes."

The man tilts his head, hand resting on the sword by his side. "Theseus, I assume. How are you still standing?"

Tommy shrugs. "I'm stronger than I look."

“I can see that.” The man says, voice low and American. “You’re not really Russian, are you?”

Tommy nearly laughs. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Heroes and Villains talk.”

Tommy wants to tense. He doesn’t. “I didn’t know you all knew each other. Does the Hero Committee know that?”

The man snorts. “Bruh. The Angel was right, you make a lot of threats that you never follow-“

Tommy shoots. He makes sure to aim for his shoulder, not wanting to instantly kill him.

The man shifts but doesn’t fall and suddenly there’s a sword to Tommy’s throat.

From there, Tommy drifts. The Huntsman takes the reins.

Smacking the sword away, he kicks at the man. He’s strong, so Tommy makes sure to limit any hits the man can inflict. They’re around the same height but Tommy is quicker.

The man spins the sword, brings it down, Tommy flinches under it, dropping to hook a foot around his ankle and tug. Tommy rolls away, the man drops and then flips up.

For a second, they stare at each other. Tommy pulls the trigger. It hits his chest - near fatal - but still, the Blood God does not fall.

He charges forward, sword slicing through the air where Tommy’s head was a second ago. He darts away. For some reason, bullets do not harm this man, at least not on his body.

Which leaves only one place left to hit and that means Tommy has to stop playing nice.

The Huntsman falls across his features. He drops the gun to his holster, gets his hand on his poisoned dagger and then moves.

Dancing out of the way of the sword, he cuts at any available skin. He’s more cautious than he would normally be but the truth is finally settling in: the Blood God controls blood. He’s obviously healing himself and if Tommy gets cut, he might end up bleeding out of the man is powerful enough. They trade blows and he’s not wrong about the man hitting hard, jaw aching.

Dropping low, Tommy grabs at the tiny, metal discs stored in his belt. He throws one. The electricity stuns the man for only a second.

That’s all Tommy needs.

He darts forward, kicking the sword from his grip. The man aims a punch. Tommy catches his arm, slips around his back and drops to his knees. With a tight grip, he hooks his arm around the man’s knee and spins, pulling the man to ground.

A throat punch, a kick to his arm and Tommy flips onto the man's chest, knee beside his ribs, a foot holding his arm down. There's a knife to the man's ribs and gun to his forehead.

Tommy pants but his arms are steady. The man is still beneath him, frozen. His sword is metres away, too far to grab. One wrong move and he either ends up with a knife to his heart or a bullet to his brain.

"I don't want to kill you," Tommy say, slowly. "But I will."

"You didn't kill the Angel or the Captain," the man beneath him breathes.

"They did not attack me."

"You shot first!"

Tommy narrows his eyes. "You said I never followed through with threats. I had to prove you wrong."

"How immature," the man mutters and Tommy lets his knife dig in.

"And yet," he whispers, "I am not the one staring death in the face. How naive." He leans closer and spits, "how cocky."

One of the biggest rules, one of the main lessons: never assume that because of their training, they're the better fighter. Tommy has fought Dream - the best - and he's fought Sapnap - the strongest - and he's fought George - the one everyone underestimates.

He knows the taste of failure and the taste of success. He knows the pain that they can inflict. Yet here he is because he survived.

He is the sole survivor of his class. Twenty eight to one. He is the Huntsman Spider.

"I could have you unconscious in seconds," the man mutters and Tommy presses the gun's muzzle harder against his forehead.

"Like how you're healing yourself from the bullets?" Tommy asks, voice dangerous, grinning when the Blood God stills, silent. "That's what I thought. You could try and blood-bend me but it takes a millisecond for me to pull this trigger. I don't think even you can heal from that."

The only sound is their breathing. Tommy doesn't dare move, waiting for what the man has up his sleeve.

"The Angel was right," the man finally speaks. "You are dangerous."

Tommy's smile drops. Yes, he is. That does not mean he is the most dangerous here.

He may have the Blood God on his back, defenceless, but he didn't become one of the three most powerful Villains in L'Manberg by being easy to kill. Tommy has the surprise advantage and the weapons: that's it.

Tommy needs to be careful.

“Do you want a job?” The man asks and it’s Tommy’s turn to still, thrown.

“What?” He breathes.

“A job,” the Blood God repeats, relaxing into the roof like he’s comfortable. “You can speak to the Angel, he’d love to have you. He won’t shut up about you. You can keep the mask on if you want.”

“A job,” Tommy parrots and then he’s up, throwing himself backwards.

Memories bombard him. George, having his cheek gripped by a random woman he was being loaned to. Dream, arriving back with a dark bruise around his throat and a viciousness to his eyes. Sappnap, needing half of the guards to restrain him to be shipped off to one of the Room’s other organisations.

“Hey,” the man breathes, sitting up as Tommy tries not to hyperventilate. “Are you okay?”

He may have been a Huntsman but he wasn’t only confined to their missions. Many other shadow organisations needed a bodyguard or an assassin. The Room liked to make a profit out of their assets.

“I work for myself,” he snaps, Russian accent heavy on his tongue, nearly making him choke. “Do not follow me.”

He stumbles from the roof, walks until he’s sure he’s not being followed and then collapses in through his apartment window.

Adrenaline pounds in his veins, making his head swim and vision blur. He’s panicking too much, he knows the Blood God is unlikely to exploit him the way the Room did but his mind doesn’t seem to agree.

He rips the mask from his face, struggles to get his stupid jacket off. He barely makes it to the bathroom before his earlier meal makes an appearance.

“Little spider,” Dream coos, a phantom hand running through his hair. Tommy shudders. “Breathe. Remember Sap’s method. Breathe for me.”

Tommy closes his eyes and tries to, his entire body protesting. Clutching his toilet, he sobs, trying to regulate his breathing.

“I- I can’t,” he whispers into thin air.

“You can, Theseus,” Dream encourages. “C’mon now, George would kill me if I left you like this. In and out.”

Tommy does as instructed, listening to the voice inside his skull. Only when he calms does he hiss, “I miss when I didn’t feel anything.”

“That’s the biggest lie you’ve ever told,” Dream murmurs, hand still in his hair. “What did Sap always used to say?”

“To feel is to be human,” Tommy recites. “That is why we are spiders.”

“You’re not a spider anymore, Theseus.” Dream says. “You’re stronger than all of us. You got out.”

For a long moment, Tommy breathes in the chill of his bathroom. Then, in a quiet voice, he whispers, “I miss you.”

When he opens his eyes, he’s alone.

He slips from the bathroom and reaches under the bed. The record player slides out and Tommy fiddles with the cue lever until the arm is in place over his record.

The sound of ABBA’s Mamma Mia starts playing and Tommy curls up on the floor, knees to his chest, face to his knees, arms locked around himself.

This is the first thing he ever bought - apart from clothes and food - that belongs to him, that is his. It’s not something the Room provided. It’s not needed for missions. It’s barely a necessity and yet, weeks into freedom, he bought this.

He stays there, shaking, listening to music, wishing for Dream to come back.

He doesn’t.

Theseus checks the bag given to him. A bottle of water, a knife and a gun. He ejects the clip, finds it’s full. There is no food or way to stay warm.

His only hope is finding shelter in the form of the Gulag hidden amongst the taiga forest before him. He can survive without food for at least a couple of days and if he really needs it, he can always hunt. Water will be worrying but the snow, so long as it’s sterilised, should last him until he finds another student.

Theseus begins his trek, holding the gun loosely, safety off.

They have been told to kill freely. That at the end of the two weeks, a flare will be released to the sky somewhere and they must report there within two hours.

Those who do not arrive - or who are dead - will be subsequently left behind.

He finds the structure as the lights dim and hunts for a remote but protected place in one of the old bunk rooms.

For three days, he is alone.

He kills a student on day four. He has dried fruit and cans in his pack. Theseus sleeps with a full stomach.

On day nine, he finds a dead student. He steals his knife and half-filled water bottle.

On day twelve, he kills another student. Theseus spends another night with a full stomach.

On the fourteenth, red paints the sky crimson. Theseus makes his way through the knee-deep snow, gun in his grip, knife tucked in his belt.

He's met with a helicopter and Sarnap's grinning face.

"Twenty," he notes into his radio. "Twenty left."

As they fly back to the Room, Theseus looks at the remaining students. There's only one twin left. The boy with the bicolour eyes is absent. The red-head is no longer there.

Theseus does not mourn.

Tommy decides to listen to Wilbur, to take the first step. He can't keep having meltdowns the minute a memory is triggered.

Tommy looks up at Niki and calmly asks, "can you call Wilbur for me?"

She smiles at him. "Of course." He sits by the counter, watching as she phones him, simply saying, "Tommy wants to see you."

Five minutes later, Wilbur appears, looking like he's not slept. His hair is a mess, his eyes are dazed and Tommy's pretty sure his shirt is inside out.

Waving goodbye to Niki, Tommy walks out of the cafe - bell chiming - with Wilbur hot on his heels. They walk in silence, Tommy leading them to a small park he found when he used to work as a waiter.

He sits on a bench and smiles when Wilbur says, "I swear you, Tubbo and Ranboo have a psychic connection considering this is their bench."

"I'm just a fucking genius." He replies and Wilbur snorts.

They sit in silence for a moment. Tommy tries to calm his heart.

"If you plan on killing me," Wilbur says, "a park isn't a great dump sight."

Tommy laughs. "We're alone, the trees hide us from the road and the only person who knows you're with me is Niki. I think I could get away with it."

Wilbur snorts then cackles. So maybe Tommy can joke about murder as a murderer and not be instantly resented.

“I’d like to see you try, gremlin.”

Tommy pauses and lets himself think it over. It would be easy to slit Wilbur’s throat. They’re alone and it’s covered and Niki wouldn’t be a problem. He’d steal Wilbur’s phone and tape it to a car and watch as it leaves. He’d tell Niki that Wilbur left him and they never saw each other again-

“So,” Wilbur says, interrupting his spiral. “Why did you want to speak to me?”

“Why do you look like shit?” Tommy asks, trying to give himself time.

Wilbur looks at him, seems to sense his inner turmoil and says, “my- my work. My brother came home with some strange information and now my family and I are at a standstill.”

“Strange information?” Tommy asks, intrigued.

Wilbur smiles. “Let’s just say we had our original preconceptions about this- this person and then the more we meet, the more he seems to pull the rug from under our feet.”

“He seems weird.” Tommy mutters and Wilbur laughs.

“Yeah but we’re willing to try. We don’t want... other people getting involved.”

Tommy nods, even if he has no idea what Wilbur is talking about.

He thinks of Dream, Sapnap and George. He remembers them all being distant in the start, when he had yet to prove himself, when he was the skinny boy no one expected to triumph.

Then as he grew older and kept outliving his classmates, suddenly it wasn’t just Dream paying him attention. He learnt of their trio. Sapnap starting bringing him into inside jokes. George started to act a little less cold.

He was yet to be a Huntsman and that meant his life was constantly on the line. They didn’t want to grow attached to someone who could die in seconds.

They never said anything but Tommy always got the feeling there were others before him, others that they made the fatal error of growing attached to and subsequently watching them die.

That was around the time Tommy realised that they were more than just Huntsman. They were human, too. They made errors, made mistakes, felt things, saw each other as friends.

“I don’t trust easy,” Tommy says, thinking of Sapnap’s warm smile and Dream’s wheezing laugh and George’s dark eyes. “But I- I’m tired. I’m so tired.”

Wilbur hums. “I’m not going to judge you, Toms. You’re interesting. There are very few interesting people in this world and yet I can’t get a read on you.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “That’s the point.”

Wilbur snorts. “Whatever, child. Your secrets are safe with me.”

Tommy looks at him and raises his eyebrows. “Somehow, I don’t believe that.”

“Pinky swear,” Wilbur says, holding his pinky finger up. Tommy, briefly puzzled, slowly raises his own and Wilbur wraps their fingers together, shaking. “Just talk and I’ll listen. Like I said, I want to help.”

Tommy pauses, thinks of a way to explain without immediately spilling everything. Wilbur is a normal citizen and Tommy was trained better than to freely give out information.

“I had three brothers.” Tommy says, quietly. “They- they did everything they could to help me even if their actions didn’t prove that. It wasn’t- wasn’t healthy but I’m alive so it worked.” Tommy takes a deep breath and whispers, “and then I betrayed them.”

Wilbur hums and reaches a slow hand over until he has Tommy’s hand in his. Tommy squeezes, hand burning from the contact. He doesn’t remember having a nice touch apart from the occasional hair ruffles.

“They saved me and I betrayed them,” he hisses, blinking back tears. “I couldn’t- I couldn’t save them. I was a coward. I ran when I should’ve- but if I stayed they would’ve-“

“Breathe,” Wilbur murmurs, squeezing his hand. “Breathe with me. In. Hold it. Out. Good. Again.”

Tommy copies his breaths until his own evens out. He looks down at their joined hands and decides he might as well go all out with the truth.

“I was the one who stole your watch,” he murmurs and Wilbur snorts.

“I know.”

Tommy snaps his head around and doesn’t see hatred or annoyance. He sees humour, amusement. Wilbur laughs at his expression.

“Tommy, I’ve never met anyone that could pick my pocket, let alone steal my watch and yet the day I met you, I got a phone call from Quackity saying he had something of mine.” Wilbur squeezes his hand. “I’m very impressed. You’re quick and you can lie very well, I almost didn’t notice.”

Tommy blinks at him. “What do you mean you almost didn’t notice?”

“Toms, I can tell when people lie to me.” Wilbur says with a grin and Tommy pales so quickly, he swears he nearly faints when Wilbur adds, looking to the trees, “although you’re a strange case, I can’t seem to read you very well.”

The blood rushes back to his head. He breathes a sigh of relief. He remembers a teacher at the Room who had the ability to sense lies. Tommy still has the scar on his neck from the gruelling torture session when the man kept pushing but Tommy wouldn’t budge.

Huntsman Spiders don't break and he is a Huntsman, through and through.

"Are you finally going to admit to being younger than eighteen?" Wilbur asks and Tommy scoffs.

"I am eighteen, dickhead."

Wilbur rolls his eyes. "See, that- that is a lie."

"It's not!"

"I'd get Phil, my dad, to adopt you if you're concerned about the foster system." Wilbur says, odd look to his eyes. "We'd look after you."

Tommy's heart doesn't beat harder at that. It doesn't.

"I'm eighteen. I don't need help. I'm fine."

"Lie," Wilbur sings. "You've mentioned your brothers - which I'm not going to discuss unless you want me to because it's clearly a sore subject - but not any parents and so you're on your own. Even if you are eighteen, you shouldn't be on your own."

"Alone is safer."

"Alone is death," Wilbur replies, voice calm, even as Tommy snaps his head to the side to gauge his expression. "To be alone is to be defenceless, unprotected. The lone wolf will die but the pack will survive. One soldier is nothing without the army behind them."

"People betray you. People will use you." Tommy says, unsure. "Friendship is complacency and complacency is death."

Wilbur looks back at him, face open. "Who told you that? Because it's complete bullshit."

Tommy frowns, dodges the question. "No, it's not."

"Tommy, I was a street kid. I know what it's like to only rely on yourself and I spent years cold and hungry. I didn't know who to trust, always assuming they were pitying me or were an enemy." He squeezes his hand again. "Then I met Phil. I thought he was a creep because he kept offering me money for food, he offered me a place to sleep. I think it took him three months to coax me into his house."

Wilbur, using his free hand, gestures to himself, exaggerates the rise and fall of his chest. "Look at me. I'm not dead. I have three meals a day and a bed to sleep in and an adoptive family that would die for me. I love them."

"Love is dangerous." Tommy says, thinking of the lessons of the Room, trying to work out what Wilbur is trying to say. "Love is for children."

"Love is the most dangerous thing on this planet," Wilbur agrees, "because to feel it, you must let yourself be vulnerable. It's like handing someone a loaded gun and praying they

don't pull the trigger. But if they love you back, they're also handing you a loaded gun." Wilbur then looks at him, "and aren't you a child?"

Tommy rolls his eyes. "Fuck off," he says but there's not bite. His thoughts are preoccupied, racing in a confused jumble.

"Whatever you did," Wilbur says, softly, "from what I can understand, it seems like your life was on the line. I'm not going to pry because I don't want to scare you away but I want you to hear this, Tommy: you survived. Whatever happened, you survived and you should be proud of yourself for that."

Wilbur squeezes his hand and Tommy looks up and whispers, "but I left them behind."

He saw what happened to those who ran, those who were caught. He saw their bodies be carted off to unmarked graves. For the first months, Tommy was only scared for himself, terrified that he would be found and taken back.

Then, after that, it was only fear for them. Would they interrogate them? Would they break them down? Would they be sent to try and kill him?

"Are they the older brothers?" He asks and Tommy nods, not understanding how that's relevant. "Then, if it were say... Tubbo and I in that situation, and he got out and he was alive, I would be so fucking glad even if that meant I couldn't be free. I would be so fucking proud." His eyes burn into Tommy, intense and passionate. "I may not know them but I know as a big brother that they would be so proud of you, Tommy."

Tommy's a little ashamed to admit that his eyes start to water. Wilbur's face crumbles at the sight of it.

"Oh, Toms," he breathes and then opens his arms, gently pulling Tommy until the boy tips forward.

It's an awkward embrace, mostly because Tommy is panicking throughout, tense and unsure. Was he ever hugged before? Is this what it feels like? His mind is running through all the ways Wilbur can harm him, that Tommy is exposing him, is being too vulnerable but he can't stop the involuntary noise that leaves his throat when Wilbur tries to pull away.

His body is starving for this type of contact. He's alone and terrified and the Room never taught him how to survive this. They never taught him how to survive without their instructions.

"I've done terrible things," he breathes into Wilbur's chest. "I'm a really fucking bad person."

"So have I, so am I." Wilbur replies, holding him tighter. "But we're alive and that's for a reason. So even if yours is just learning to be okay, then that's all you have to do, Tommy."

Tommy takes a deep breath, finally pulls away, still gripping Wilbur's hand like a life line. He doesn't try to stop it so Tommy assumes he's not crossing some boundary.

He wipes his eyes, glad he didn't cry.

He feels too raw, these days, like without the Room, his mind is succumbing to the years of manipulation and mind-wipes.

"You're a good big brother," he says and Wilbur smiles over at him.

"Yeah? I'd like to think so."

"Tubbo and Ranbo are lucky to have you."

Wilbur rolls his eyes. "So are you."

Tommy blinks at him, furrows his brow. "What?"

"Oh, Toms. We've shared a moment," he says, pitching his voice high. "That means you're my new little brother. No! You cannot refuse."

"That makes no fucking sense," Tommy groans but Wilbur squeezes his hand, smiles at him sweetly. It's a little terrifying.

"It's okay. It took Techno - my older brother - at least six months before he said he loved me." Wilbur's eyes spark dangerously. "I can be patient."

"Fuck off." Tommy stares at him. "I'm not your brother, man."

"You are," he says. "I've decided."

"I'm not!"

"You are."

"Oh my god, you're a bitch."

"You'll love me eventually." Wilbur smirks. "The rest of them did."

"Speaking of the rest of them," Tommy says, trying to change the subject away from the fact this man he's met three times sees him as a brother, "how come you're so bothered by my age when Tubbo and Ranboo are living alone?"

Wilbur shrugs, even as he gives Tommy a look that tells him he knows exactly what he's doing. "It was Tubbo's sixteenth birthday gift."

Tommy's eyes widen. "What the fuck? He got a fucking house? How rich are you?"

Wilbur snorts. "Phil's a businessman. That's how we know Quackity."

"Quackity's business is illegal," Tommy says.

Wilbur looks at him. Tommy looks back. Tommy sighs, knowing exactly what that look means.

“I can’t escape the criminal world, can I?” Tommy mutters, leans back against the bench. “Quackity and now you? Unbelievable. I fucking hate it here.”

Wilbur laughs, squeezing his hand. “Well,” he says, voice dropping and Tommy tenses, knowing he’s probably not going to like what comes out of Wilbur’s mouth. “Since you’ve been open, I think I should reciprocate. Want to meet the rest of my family?”

Tommy blinks. “What?”

Wilbur laughs again, pulling him up from the bench.

Tommy takes it all back. He definitely liked it more when he didn’t allow himself to be vulnerable.

“C’mon, Toms, it’s going to be fun.”

Based on Wilbur’s grin, Tommy very much does not agree.

Chapter End Notes

Getting some hints, getting some implications ;)

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions! Take care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Some revelations ;)

TW// past abuse, weaponry, injury and scar mention, brief mention of trafficking, brief mention of child death, hallucinations, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If he thought Tubbo and Ranboo's house was beautiful, it's nothing on Wilbur's.

It's more homely than he would've thought considering Wilbur's style. Carpeted floors and wooden furniture, the distressed kind but lived in. There are ornaments everywhere: trinkets and vases and odd looking items Tommy can't understand.

There are blankets thrown over the couches and a newspaper and glasses atop the granite table top in the kitchen.

It makes something catch in Tommy's throat. He never got any of this.

He had beautiful architecture that left him cold. This is not a house, this is a home.

"Phil!" Wilbur calls. "I brought home the stray!"

"Fuck off," Tommy grumbles, trying to memorise the layout without being too obvious.

Footsteps sound to the right of him and he turns, hair on the back of his neck rising, looking up to be met with the sight of a man. He has long pink hair, in a half-up, half-down style. In comfy-looking sweatpants and a large hoodie, Tommy wouldn't find the man a threat, apart from the fact he looks built. Very built.

"The one you left the house in a rush for?" He drawls and Tommy studies him. Something about him is familiar, something that makes warning bells ring in Tommy's ears.

"Tommy," Wilbur says. "Meet Technoblade. Techno, meet Tommy."

Tommy looks at the man and asks, "are you as much of a bitch as Wilbur is?"

Technoblade raises his eyebrows at him. "Wilbur, when you said he was a stray, I didn't realise you meant he was feral."

Tommy narrows his eyes. "I will stab you, bitch."

“I’d like to see you try.”

Tommy takes a step forward - he’s not actually going to stab the man but the thought is a soothing one - but Wilbur throws his arm out, stopping Tommy in his tracks.

“No stabbing.” Wilbur mutters and then gives him a long look. “Or biting.”

“Hey!” Just because Sapnap has an indent in his hand from Tommy’s teeth, does not mean Tommy is a biter.

Wilbur pats his shoulder in a patronising manner. “Don’t worry, Tech, I’ll make sure he’s good.”

Something about those words make Tommy tense and bristle. He hisses, “I’m not a fucking dog.”

Wilbur’s eyes soften. “No,” he agrees. “You’re not. Let’s go find dad.”

Technoblade watches them, an odd look to his crimson eyes. Tommy notices them, now, knowing that like the bright hair, they’re probably the physical representation of a power.

Maybe he should be listening to the warning bells in his head.

“He’s in his study.” Technoblade says and then his eyes flash. “Wil-“

“Don’t,” Wilbur says, voice firm. There’s also a strange tone to it, something lulling. It makes Technoblade snap his mouth shut, eyes darkening.

Tommy’s watches the interaction curiously. He knows they’re criminals, Wilbur’s stare earlier was telling enough but Tommy would guess there’s more.

“C’mon Tommy,” Wilbur says, making his voice light.

He spares Technoblade another stare. The man is interesting, especially if Tommy’s mind is so panicked by his presence. Whatever is happening here, he doubts it’s sunshine and rainbows.

Yet as they climb the wooden stairs and hold onto the glass railing, they pass a set of picture frames hanging from the wall.

There’s ones of a small boy, pink hair cut close to his head, crimson eyes bright behind his fringe. His hand is clutched in the larger one of a man with gold hair, wearing a suit of green.

As they climb higher, the boy grows. First shooting up until he towers over the blond man and then growing muscle. As he grows, another boy joins the photos. The other boy is tall and lanky, clearly malnourished in the first pictures, but gaining weight as he, too, grows.

He grows until he’s taller than the pink haired man, head a mop of brown curls, eyes dark. In most of the pictures he’s either wearing something yellow or he’s holding an instrument of some kind.

Then, as they climb up the last steps, pictures of a boy with four wings and antenna fill the frames. There are very few of him alone. Most are filled with him beside a much taller boy, bicolour eyes and dyed hair.

In all of the photos, the blond man remains unchanged apart from his clothes. He carries the same smile, the same laugh-lines by his eyes.

So maybe it is all sunshine and rainbows.

“I don’t understand,” Tommy admits as Wilbur leads him down a landing.

“What about?”

“You-“ Tommy struggles for a second. “I- you look happy. You all look happy. How hasn’t this life changed you?”

Wilbur pauses and looks down at him, a sad smile to his lips. “We have each other. It’s not always easy and I can’t begin to explain how many fights I’ve had in this house but we have each other.”

Tommy frowns but nods. He doesn’t know if the Room even kept documents of them. He assumes they did but he doesn’t remember his photo being taken. He remembers the security cameras at the doors but that’s it.

They approach a painted door, chipping green at the edges. There are handprints in pink and yellow, in blue and purple, in red and black along the bottom and Tommy smiles when Wilbur laughs at the sight of them.

“He’s sentimental,” he says and then knocks.

Through the door, someone calls, “come in.”

If Tommy assumed the study would somehow be more clinical, he was gravelly mistaken. There are bookshelves and a desk filled with papers and stationary items. It’s messy and disorganised and Tommy can’t help but be shocked by it.

The Room was all about cleanliness, about keeping things orderly. A Huntsman had to be an organised person so that they had an organised head. His bed was made to standard, tucked and pressed. His weapons regularly cleaned and his person presentable.

It seems these people don’t work by those rules.

The Minecraft’s home is chaotic.

Behind the desk, Tommy meets blue eyes and more warning bells ring in his head. The blond man smiles at him, dressed like Technoblade in loose, comfortable clothes. Looking at him, he looks tired and his shoulders keep relaxing and tensing.

“Tommy, meet Philza,” Wilbur introduces. “Phil, meet Tommy.”

“Hi, mate,” Phil says and Tommy waves at him.

“Hi.”

Wilbur frowns down at him. “Three seconds ago you were threatening to stab Techno. Why are you being shy?”

Tommy glares at him. “This is your dad. Sorry I’m not instantly going for the threatening behaviour.”

Not just that, something is making Tommy twitch for the pocketknife in his pocket. There’s a peculiar atmosphere. One that leaves every instinct calling for him to be paying more attention, for him to be prepared and ready and waiting.

It sings to him of danger, as though he’s walked into a trap.

He looks to Phil and says, “do you look tired because of this person Wilbur mentioned?”

Phil’s smile becomes strained as his gaze jumps to Wilbur’s, shoulders rolling. His son shrugs and says, “he knows we’re criminals and he’s still here.”

“I literally work for Quackity,” Tommy mutters. “It’s not like I can judge you.”

And the fact that he’s a trained killer but Tommy never wants to admit that.

Phil’s smile loses it’s strain. “Yes, you could say this person is giving us all a headache.”

“I’m just impressed he got Techno like that,” Wilbur says, smirking.

“I told you all to be careful,” Phil says with a sigh. “Techno thinks he can take on the world. I just worry about the other guy.”

Tommy frowns at them. “What the fuck are you two on about?”

Wilbur sighs. “It’s complicated and as much as you’re technically involved in this through Quackity, I’m not involving you further.”

Phil nods. “No more asking people if they want jobs.”

Wilbur snorts and Phil smiles. Tommy, well, Tommy tries to stop the instinctive need to freeze, to flee.

Technoblade’s hair, Phil’s shoulders twitching, the person they’re after, the fact Tommy can’t find anything about the Minecraft’s, Quackity’s involvement.

Tommy hasn’t just entered a trap, he’s walked straight into the lion’s den. Or, better known as, the Syndicate’s home.

Phil is hiding his wings. Technoblade isn’t hiding his hair. Wilbur is hiding his voice.

Angel of Death. Blood God. Morningstar. The top three Villains, the leaders to the biggest crime ring in America, some of the most powerful beings due to their abilities.

And Tommy is standing in their home, in their messy and chaotic and old fashioned home, with nothing but a pocketknife on him.

“Calm down,” Dream breathes in his mind.

“Relax your shoulders,” George adds.

“Smile back,” Sapnap says.

He knows they’re not real, knows his mind is playing tricks on him but in that moment, he can practically feel them. Dream behind him, Sapnap to the left, George to the right.

He follows their instructions. He takes a soft breath, relaxes his shoulders and smiles back at Phil with a confused grin. He looks up to Wilbur and says, “still have no clue what the fuck you’re on about.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes, grabs his shoulder affectionately. Tommy resists the urge to flinch or panic further. He needs to calm down, like Dream said.

Especially with Technoblade below, who can sense fear. He swallows it, bottles it, remembers George’s lessons on schooling his features.

Out of all of them, with Dream baring his emotions too freely and Sapnap showing his anger without warning, George was always the calm one, the collected one, the cold one.

“Doesn’t matter, Toms.” Wilbur says. “So, what do you think of my family?”

Tommy wants to laugh hysterically but he controls it. He is a Huntsman. He was the best in his class. Twenty-eight to one.

“You’re all weird.” He says and smiles when Wilbur and Phil both laugh. “I prefer Tubbo.”

“Hey,” Wilbur pouts at him. Morningstar is pouting at him. “I’m so much cooler than Tubbo.”

“You’re a filthy liar,” Tommy says with a sniff, crosses his arms over his chest. “Don’t make me break something.”

“Aw, Toms,” Wilbur coos and then says to Phil, “isn’t he cute?”

That’s an opportunity if Tommy’s ever seen one.

With a lasting sniff, he looks to Phil and says, “you’re... not a bitch.”

He then spins on his heel and stalks from the study, across the landing and down the stairs with all the pictures. Wilbur rushes after him, hands flapping around Tommy as if he’s

worried about touching him. Good. That means Tommy can get further away without be stopped.

“Tommy! Tommy, come back! Tom-“

“Leaving so soon?” Technoblade drawls and Tommy pauses to look at him and nod.

“You’re a bitch but not as much as Wilbur is.” He comments and continues on to the front door, Wilbur trailing behind.

“Seriously? What’s wrong? I’m sorry for calling you cute,” Wilbur says and Tommy stops at the door, mind calming at the sight of the exit.

“It’s not that,” he says, looks down, remembering Wilbur said he can sense lies. “Although if you call me cute again, I will stab you. It’s just- people find me annoying and I’d rather leave than get kicked out.”

“No one is going to kick you out,” Wilbur breathes, honesty in his tone and it hurts. God, does it hurt. Why is he being so nice when he doesn’t even know Tommy?

Tommy, who shot his father and nearly killed his brother. Tommy, the trained killer known as Theseus. Tommy, the Huntsman.

“I’m just overwhelmed,” he murmurs and Wilbur places a warm hand on his shoulder.

“Okay,” Wilbur relents and then says, “wait a second.”

The panic returns before Tommy swallows it down. He watches Wilbur step away to a cabinet, open it and then remove something. He offers it to Tommy with an embarrassed grin.

Only when Tommy accepts it does he realise it’s a mobile phone, a burner one.

“It has my number in it,” Wilbur says. “Call if you need anything.”

Tommy looks up at Wilbur’s face and the panic is replaced with burning confusion. Why? How can Wilbur be Morningstar but also this kind person?

“Thank you,” Tommy replies, words heavy with honesty.

“I just want you to know that I’m here to listen and to help.” Wilbur says as he opens the door. “Want me to walk you back to Niki’s?”

Tommy shakes his head, holding the phone with a delicacy it doesn’t need. “Nah. I’m good, big man. Thank you. Seriously.”

Wilbur smiles. “Anytime.”

Tommy walks away, confusion clouding his mind.

“You care about each other,” Theseus says, sitting beside Sapnap at the bar, feet dangling from the stool. They’re both watching the man across the pub, making sure he drinks his spiked beer.

Sapnap looks down at him, something flashing in his dark eyes. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Theseus looks at him and says, “you pack your punches. So does Dream. So does George. You make it hard enough to look real, to make me bleed but not as much as you hurt the others.”

“Theseus,” Sapnap says lowly, dangerously, using his real name, not his cover one. “Shut up.”

He thinks it’s the low lighting of the pub, the loud noise from the live band that’s making him so careless, so bold. It doesn’t matter. He knows the truth.

“To feel is to be human, that is why we are spiders.” He says, quietly, meeting Sapnap’s eyes without flinching, the way he’s been taught. “But we weren’t always spiders.”

Sapnap reaches for him, curls an arm around his shoulder, hand gripping the back of his neck and pulls him closer. Theseus doesn’t worry. He knows the truth.

“You ever say that shit out-loud, we’re all dead.”

Theseus sighs and pulls away. The man has swallowed his beer and has begun to sway. He grabs Sapnap’s hand and pulls him from the bar, from the low lighting of the pub.

Before they breach the exit, back into the outside world, back to the Room, Theseus says, “I will survive. For me and for you, Dream and George.”

The minute the warm air hits them, he drops Sapnap’s hand and they enter the trunk silently. He ignores the glances from Sapnap.

Theseus knows the truth. That’s enough.

A storm rages outside. He watches through his tiny window, the book on his lap left unread. He really needs to start reading, or at least pretend to before one of the guards comes in.

He’s already under surveillance. He doesn’t want to panic them further, not when they’re so trigger-happy.

Not that he minds. Not when Theseus got out. He’d gladly relive the past year just to feel that type of joy again.

A creak has him standing, book forgotten. The door opens. He’s met with the face of George and Sapnap, flanked by guards.

There's still a handprint bruise on Sapnap's cheek, burns on George's neck. After the defection, all of them were interrogated, even some of the Widows.

Not that they were lying when they said they didn't know anything.

All he remembers is Theseus' terrified eyes and then an explosion. He'd collapsed, unconscious and when he woke, he was met with the news that their star pupil had fled the web, severing all ties.

He's never been more proud. Not that he'd admit that.

"Dream," George says, eyes flicking over his face as if to make sure he's alright, lingering on the scar there. "Eret wants us."

Dream nods, walks out and finds himself flanked. He nearly laughs. It would take more than two guards each to stop any of them but they're quiet, calm. Not for their sakes, for Theseus'. If the boy is alive out there - which Dream believes he is, what with the strange visions he's been having - they need to be able to fight for him, they need to stay alive for him.

Just like how he survived for them.

Walking along the winding corridors, Dream hates the new facility they're in. It's too clinical. None of the beautiful architecture of the original Red Room remains.

It's all harsh concrete and cold brick. There's an electric fence and guard towers, as if to deter anymore defections.

They approach a metal door. One of the guards opens it for them, pressing in the digits on the keypad. As Dream scans his peripheral, he watches George roll his eyes.

Yes, they've already memorised it. God, do the guards think they're that stupid?

The door creaks open and the three are ushered in. Across from them, Eret sits, in their usual attire of regal wear. Dark glasses sit on their face and none of them hide their smirks at the sight.

Theseus may have failed in his initial plan but he still blinded the man before them. Dream is so proud.

"My spiders," Eret greets, voice honeyed. "I have a job for you."

"All of us?" Sapnap asks and even Dream is frowning at that. They're the best in the facility and for all of them to be gone? It doesn't look good.

One of the guards behind Eret steps forward, opens a drawer and throws a folder onto the desk. George steps forward and takes it, scanning the text. His face grows pale. Sapnap and Dream share a look.

"In L'Manberg," Eret says, grinning, "it appears our little traitor has made a name for himself."

George flicks to a page, the text from a newspaper, talking about a new vigilante going by the name Theseus.

Dream clenches his fist, Sapnap swallows, George skims the page, eyes dark.

“What do you need us to do?” George asks, voice as calm as ever.

“Nothing for now,” Eret says. “Your loyalties are still in question after his little defection. I can’t have all of my spiders leaving the web so soon.”

Something about the words have them all shuddering, minds burning. Dream blinks the haze from his eyes.

“We’re simply watching the situation, waiting. No point in rushing over there, not when he could easily run again.” Eret leans forward, smiling wide. “No, my job is for you three to begin training again. We need more recruits if we are to head to L’Manberg.”

They all share a look. They know what that means. Hunting in the local orphanages, searching through the trafficking rings. It means watching young children fight one another, watching them kill one another, watching them die.

Long ago, when Dream was only a recruit, George had told him to do only one thing: survive.

They all share a nod. “Yes, sir,” they say and Eret claps.

“Good. Pack your things, you’ll start tonight.”

Chapter End Notes

I would just like to say, I love the comments on this - seeing all of you debate what powers they have and such is so fulfilling for me. I’m glad you’re all enjoying it :)

Thank you for your comments, kudos and interactions! You better be taking care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

More bonding, more bonding but also, some sadness :)

TW// past abuse, mentions of death and murder, weaponry, past brainwashing, swearing

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy didn't grow up like other children, not that it's shocking. He didn't watch their TV, didn't experience sleepovers or go to football games.

But he did share one thing with them: he, too, has a favourite Hero.

The Room taught them about the different Heroes and Villains of each continent. However, they varied. Most of Asia was ruled by Heroes. Europe preferred to self-police, keeping Heroes more on the down-low than using them for media coverage. America, on the other hand, was rife with Heroes and Villains considering the Hero Committee.

Tommy learnt about their weaknesses and strengths, hearing rumours through the criminal underground.

So fighting the Captain was strange for him, just as involving himself into the lives of the Syndicate Villains.

He never did expect to meet his favourite Hero, though.

"Trigger," he greets, accent now more like Sapnap's, just to mess with them. Sapnap always liked Texas, he doesn't know why. "Nice to meet you."

The man raises his eyebrows at him, sclera black and irises yellow. His hair is a dark green and smoke pours from the gas mask he wears.

Tommy is cautious. This is a Hero that can create explosions. He doesn't fancy being on the receiving end of that.

"Theseus," the man responds, voice low and Tommy definitely doesn't smile behind his mask at the knowledge of the man knowing who he is. "Are you going to try and kill me?"

"Depends," Tommy says with a shrug. "Are you going to corner me?"

Trigger leans back on his feet. "I have a feeling that wouldn't end well for me. So no."

Tommy nods. "Then no, I'm not going to try and kill you."

Trigger studies him and then says, “you’re not what I expected.”

Tommy tilts his head. “What does that mean?”

“Vigilantes normally fall into two categories: I’m a Hero but I kill people so I can’t be counted as a Hero and I hate Heroes but I also don’t want to be a Villain.” Trigger says, slowly. “I would put you in the first category but you don’t strike me as the type to want to be a Hero. So why are you doing this? Why are you hunting in L’Manberg?”

Tommy shrugs. “I’ve got red in my ledger. I’d like to wipe it out.”

Trigger contemplates this. “So you’re killing people to make up for killing people?”

Tommy frowns. “When you put it like that, it sounds bad.”

“Well, you’re the one killing people,” Trigger says but there’s a hint of amusement there.

“Only because they’re terrible people,” Tommy points out, keeping his hand close to his holstered gun. “I mean, you’re going to arrest them, they serve two to ten and then get out, and do the same thing. If you’re a rapist or a pedophile, being surrounded by other rapists and pedophiles isn’t going to magically make you a better person.”

“You’re not giving them the option to try and be better,” Trigger says, lightly. “At the end of the day: you’re still a murderer.”

Tommy pauses at that. He knows. God, does he know he’s still a murderer. His hands are permanently red now from the blood he’s split and there’s nothing he can do to change that.

By hunting the bad people - the ones that made him, the ones that used him - he thought he could repay that debt. He thought he could prove he was more than a trained killer.

But Trigger is correct. Tommy will always be a murderer.

“The other Heroes are willing to listen to your side of the story,” Trigger continues in Tommy’s silence. “We could use someone as talented as you, especially when you can take down the Blood God.”

“L’Manberg is such a gossip city.” Tommy scoffs. “I thought you said I’d always be murderer. Surely you can’t have me standing beside you, tainting your image of perfect little Heroes?”

“Like I said, the Committee is willing to listen-“

“And like I told the Blood God, I work for me and only me.” He snaps, heart pounding.

He will not panic over this. He won’t let himself break. He is a Huntsman. He is stronger than that.

“We just want you to know some of your options,” Trigger says, holding his hands up in a surrender. “At least with us, your image can change-“

Something burns inside of Tommy, something dark and poisonous.

He had an image once: the perfect student, the one that survived. Like Dream, he was the Room's saving grace, their reason for existing. They made him, raised him, moulded a perfect killer and he repaid them by burning it to the ground.

Tommy doesn't care for images anymore. He cares for freedom.

Tommy turns around, stalks back the way he came.

"Wait!" Trigger calls and Tommy shouldn't. He should keep going or incapacitate the Hero to stop him from following.

But Tommy remembers watching the film reels of the Heroes fighting, remembers the way the Captain could bend reality and Vulpes tricking his opponents, fox ears on his head and Chronos rewinding time to assist his fellow Heroes.

He remembers watching Trigger control his explosions to save the public, smoke billowing from his gas mask.

Tommy pauses. "Why should I?"

"Because I want to get to know you," Trigger says, voice pleading. "We all do. Do you know how hard you are to find? We only know you've been out when the media find the bodies."

Tommy turns, meets those yellow eyes. "I don't want to work for either of you. I'm not a Hero but I'm not a Villain. I told you, I'm fixing the mistakes of my past."

Trigger holds his hands up in a surrender. "Then I'm not going to try and change your mind. I just want you to know the option is there. Can we just talk?"

Tommy frowns at him. "What is it with people in L'Manberg and wanting to know all my personal information?"

What is it with Tommy and wanting to divulge said information?

He should be better than this. He was trained better than this. Tommy survived the Room's interrogations, he never broke and yet these people show once ounce of care and Tommy is succumbing like sand between fingers.

Trigger gives him a look. "How many vigilante's have you seen on our streets? If there's a Hero or a Villain, we know about them. You're not affiliated with either."

"That's the point," Tommy says and then shrugs. "I'm not here to upset the balance or anything. I just want to help people. I might not be here for long."

Trigger cocks his head. "You're leaving?"

"This was more of a stop off point." Tommy replies. "I've already stayed longer than I should."

He is, after all, being hunted.

As much as Tommy wants to believe no one is taking notice, it's suspicious that no news outlet - not even the criminal ones - have heard anything about the Room. Something is wrong and Tommy would rather not be in a place where his former name is his vigilante one, the one the local media have took to.

"Is someone after you?" Trigger asks, voice concerned and Tommy is momentarily thrown by it. Why do these people care about him? Why do they care so easily?

"I'll be fine," Tommy says as an answer, even if it might be a lie.

If the Room finds him, he'll be punished. They'll either drag him back and recalibrate him or he'll be shot like a rabid dog.

He thinks, maybe if it's one of his brothers pulling the trigger, he wouldn't mind as much.

"We could-" Trigger pauses, swallows. "We would look after you, if you needed it."

Tommy blinks. "What?"

"No one expects you to show your face!" Trigger hastens to explain, hand shooting up, smoke pouring from his mask. "If you want to stay with the Syndicate, I'm sure they'd look after you to. And they'd probably hunt down whoever's coming for you."

Tommy-

Tommy doesn't know what to say.

"Why?" He croaks out, clawing to keep the Texan accent in place.

Trigger's eyes go soft. "Because I don't think you're a bad person and even I can tell there's something up with you. Normally I don't care what the Angel says but the Captain likes you-"

"Even after I stabbed her?" Tommy interrupts and Trigger laughs.

"Yes. Even after that and I trust her opinion."

"You don't know me." Tommy says, and wonders if he even knows himself.

As the days go by, he's slowly learning things about himself. He likes slushies and doesn't understand the jokes in American TV shows. He likes music and cows and has a faux dislike for Americans.

At least he thinks it's fake. He was trained to hate everyone who wasn't Russian, to see them as weak, to see them as nothing but marks.

"I'd like to." Trigger says, smile to his voice.

Tommy stares at him. “You’re all confusing.”

“Yeah?” Trigger says, voice lighter.

“You’re not suppose to- I thought- they said- I don’t-“ Tommy closes his mouth, hand twitching for his gun as he makes eye contact. After a moment, he says, “I don’t understand why you’re all talking to me. You don’t talk with the enemy, you shoot first, ask questions later.”

Trigger steps forward. Tommy steps back. Trigger sighs, runs a hand through his green hair, his trident sticking over his shoulder.

“Theseus,” Trigger says, slowly. “You’re not the enemy. Even if you were, shooting first means you learn nothing. I want to know why you feel like you have to do this, I want to know why you have red in your ledger, as you say.”

Has he been taught a lie?

Tommy knows the Room is a bad place. Through his missions, through bonding with Dream, Sapnap and George, Tommy found that his life had more of a purpose than incessant bloodshed.

He could be a Huntsman and a human. He couldn’t do it under the Room’s watchful eyes.

But even now, he still thought some of their lessons were important, were useful. They taught him how to live, how to be a good killer. They taught him that the world was crueler than them and that is why they are cruel.

Yet L’Manberg doesn’t seem to work by those rules.

The Heroes and Villains know one another. Not only that, neither seem to mind Tommy picking off the low-level criminals he finds. They also like to talk to him: caring more about understanding his motives than wanting him dead.

The Room did not teach him this. In fact, they taught him the opposite.

“I don’t understand,” he repeats, takes another step back, heart pounding. He sounds like a child, like the child he was before his innocence was beaten out of him.

He clears his throat. “I have to go.”

Ignoring the protests from Trigger, Tommy runs.

Theseus is his name, even if he isn’t sure who gave it to him. He is young, he is skinny and he is small but he is smart. He sees the game before the others even realise they’re playing.

Theseus does not fight the elders over his name. He does not cry at night like some of the others when their hands are cuffed to the bed frames. He does not try and make friends.

Not when a boy was taken away and never returned for his allergy. Not when he sees the older students, the graduated Huntsman Spiders, and notes the scars on their hands, on their arms, the emptiness of their gazes.

He is smart and he survives. He keeps surviving even when it seems like he won't.

He may not be the fastest or the strongest. He may get pushed down more than he can feasibly get up but he rises. Each time he rises because he will not die here.

He refuses to be one of the boys who now reside in the unmarked graves.

Only when he is growing, only when he defies the odds does he finally allow himself to accept the older Huntsman's help.

George, the oldest, the one who never misses his targets, the one who only has to hold a weapon to be able to master it. Dream, the one that looks like him, the best there is, the one that can control the very materials of the earth with little strain. Sapnap, the youngest, the one that can create and control fire, the one that can heal any wound, the one that they call the Phoenix.

He is taken under their wing and he knows his superiors are only allowing it because he is proving himself. He is mouldable, malleable. He is made of marble.

"I cannot help you," George tells him, before one of his assessments. "But if there is one thing I can say, it's this: survive. Do whatever it takes, do whatever they tell you. Just survive."

Theseus loses his body, his mind, his soul.

He does not mourn for he survives.

Twenty-eight to one.

He is the only survivor.

"Wilbur wants to adopt you," Quackity tells him, the minute Tommy sits down in his office.

He looks tired, Tommy notes. His beanie is barely on his head, his scar looks red at the edges, like he's been itching it, and his clothes aren't pressed. Quackity doesn't look like the businessman Tommy normally sees. He looks like a man.

"You sound jealous, Big Q," Tommy replies, knowing he probably doesn't look too good either.

After his encounter with Trigger, Tommy promptly went back to his apartment and spent a few hours trying to sleep. He eventually succumbed to unconsciousness but was woken by a memory.

Tommy, standing in the great hall, glock in hand and pointed at a kneeling Dream. Eret, telling him to shoot. Tommy pulling the trigger.

He knows now that it was a blank, a test to prove his loyalty but it still jarred him awake. He still remembers Dream's eyes, accepting and calm, not angry or upset.

If he died by Tommy's hand, he was okay with that.

And Tommy still betrayed him.

Quackity's laugh snaps Tommy out of his haze.

"I'm not jealous," Quackity says. "I'm simply... confused."

Tommy tilts his head. "About?"

"I assumed you were a lone wolf and yet I'm hearing that you've been invited back to Wilbur's house?"

Tommy looks at him, sees the rage and says, "are you- are you actually angry?"

He doesn't quite know what to make of it. He knows Quackity isn't like the Handlers he had in the Room. Here, in Las Nevadas, he does not get hurt when he is wrong. Here, he is safe to have an opinion. He can yell and scream and threaten and no one will kill him for it.

However, he's still reeling from his chat with Wilbur - and discovering that he's Morningstar - and his chat with Trigger.

He's supposed to be better than this and yet he can't stop thinking about Wilbur holding his hand, the warmth of it, the calm that settled in his mind. But Wilbur is Morningstar. He's dangerous and deadly and Tommy can't seem to care.

Quackity's face does something complicated. "Not with you," he says and Tommy finds himself relaxing.

"With Wilbur? Why?"

"Finders keepers." Quackity says and when Tommy raises his eyebrows, he shrugs. "What? I found you first, he doesn't get to waltz in and take my best pickpocket. Fucking tall bastard."

"He's not adopting me, Big Q," Tommy says, calmer now that he knows Quackity's not upset with him. "He's just being fucking weird because we had a little talk about feelings."

Quackity frowns at him. "We can talk about feelings, Tommy. You know I'm always here to listen."

"You're running Las Nevadas," Tommy reminds Quackity, the entire situation baffling him. "Also, you're my boss."

Quackity's frown deepens. "Does it look like I give a shit about my nation when you're here? You're more important, Tommy. I'm not letting Wilbur fucking Soot-Minecraft steal you away because he has more time on his hands."

For a second, Tommy pauses and then says, "wait, do you two- do you have beef with Wilbur? Is this like a rivalry thing?"

"I have no idea what you mean, Tommy." Quackity says with shifty eyes.

Tommy feels his expression lift. "Oh my god, you're fighting over me like I'm the kid in a custody battle."

Quackity looks away, sniffs. "I'll have you know I'm in a very loving and committed relationship--"

"Were you and Wilbur a thing?" Tommy asks, gleeful and intrigued, leaning forward with a smile. "Oh, this is fucking hilarious. Where's Charlie? I need to tell him- Niki! Niki has to know about this--"

"Tommy." Quackity says, voice firm even as he keeps his gaze on his desk. "Wilbur and I are not, and never were, involved."

Tommy's grin widens as he narrows his eyes. "Will Wilbur agree with that statement?"

Quackity glares at him. "I'm not responding without a lawyer present."

"You are a lawyer."

Quackity waves his hand in a dismal and then pouts at Tommy. "Is it because he's British? Is this some British bonding shit I'm not aware of?"

Tommy almost wants to call him out on his clear subject change but this is too good. Tommy laughs at Quackity. God, Quackity couldn't be more wrong about all of that.

"Q," Tommy says, leans forward. "He's just very pushy. It's not because he's British."

"Pushy?" Quackity's eyes darken. "Too pushy?"

Tommy blinks and then throws his hands up. "Okay, I need you be honest with me here because I'm very confused." At Quackity's eyebrow raise and nod, Tommy asks, "do you L'Manbergians have some shit in your water because you're all too nice?"

Quackity's face falls and suddenly, he's studying Tommy like Tommy is an insect in a glass cage. Tommy refuses to shift under the weight of his stare, even as his fingers twitch for the gun in his waistband.

"What?" He snaps.

Quackity shakes himself and says, "Tommy, why do you say that like no one's ever been nice to you before?"

Tommy narrows his eyes, thinking of three faces in particular. "I didn't mean it like that."

"I know," Quackity says, softly. "I can't answer that question because most people are independent in their own morals but L'Manberg's views are shared by many places. I mean, based on statistics, L'Manberg is actually a bad place to live considering the crime rings."

"There are nicer places?" Tommy breathes and Quackity's face is so open and concerned.

"Yeah, Tommy. I'm sure Charlie would love a vacation - I'll show you all the nice places in the world if you want."

Tommy pauses. Is he going to cry? He blinks back the tears and looks to his lap. What is it with L'Manberg and breaking down his defences?

"Tommy, are you okay?" Quackity murmurs and Tommy shrugs.

"I don't know." He clears his throat, looks up to be met with a very worried gaze and plasters a smile to his lips. "I'll be okay. What about you? Any luck hunting down your rogue fiancé?"

Quackity's face scrunches up. "Don't- don't fucking deflect when it's clear you're hurting."

"I'm not hurting." Tommy replies, itching for his gun. "I can handle it. Tell me about- about Karl or this other guy, Nick, right?"

Under his breath Quackity breathes, "maybe Wilbur is better for this. If anyone can get someone to talk, it's him."

Ice washes through Tommy's bones as the statement hits him. It's been staring at him in the face this whole time and he's overlooked it.

Wilbur is Morningstar, which means he has Morningstar's abilities to sense and pull secrets from the person he's directing his attention to. Not only that, he can lie-detect and compel people to talk.

Has Wilbur known about him this entire time? Did Tommy spill something or did Wilbur force it?

Tommy can't remember saying anything that would implicate the Room - it always drifts in his mind, a memory that no interrogation can pull from him - but maybe Wilbur doesn't need a verbal answer. He does always look troubled when Tommy can't help but remember his past.

After all, most of the Villain's powers are nothing but rumours. If their weaknesses were broadcast, a Heroes day would be very easy.

Tommy feels stupid, he feels betrayed.

Maybe the Room was right: people are cruel.

“Is that why he wants to talk to me?” Tommy asks, voice small and Quackity pales. “He doesn’t actually care, he just wants to know what makes me tick? I’m just a fucking science experiment because I’m interesting?”

“Tommy, I didn’t mean that-“

Tommy stands, shakes his head. “I’ll- I won’t need a job for a while, Quackity. Thanks for helping me.”

He stalks away, ignoring Quackity trying to rush after him.

“Listen to me! Tommy!”

Tommy keeps walking. He passes a wide eyed Purpled and then Punz, who has his hand on his holster. Tommy nearly laughs at the sight. If he wanted them dead, they’d be dead

Tommy pushes past him, heads for the door when something drops in front of him.

He reels back, fists clenching as he shifts his weight, prepares for a fight without drawing his weapon. Only to be face to face with Charlie.

The man blinks behind his glasses, shaking his hair out from his eyes. He frowns at the sight of Tommy and then looks up.

“I fell through the floor again,” he states and Tommy smiles despite himself.

“What did it this time, a fucking mouse?”

Charlie grins at him, rolls his eyes. “I’ll have you know it was actually my reflection in a mirror.”

Tommy laughs, calmed instantly. “You’re so fucking weird.”

“And your running from Quackity,” Charlie says, looking over Tommy’s shoulder to Quackity before looking back at Tommy. He holds up his arms, hands in fists and pretends to box. “I can knock him out for you if you want?”

Tommy shakes his head with a smile. “I’m good, Charlie-“

“No, you’re burger.”

Tommy squashes the laugh and glares at him as Charlie giggles. “I hate you.”

“No, you don’t.” Charlie says and then adds, “want to get ice cream?”

“So long as Fundy’s not the one serving me, sure.”

And if Quackity follows with Purpled and Punz, if Tommy stays there for longer than he should, then he only has himself to blame. For getting attached, for wanting connection.

Before he can leave, Quackity leans over and says, “Wilbur doesn’t see you as a science experiment, Tommy. I think he does actually care about you.”

Tommy ignores him.

If he leaves after an hour, calmer but with a heavy heart, adrift in his sea of confusing, complicated emotions, then maybe he should have listened to his teachers back at the Room.

Wilbur only wants to help Tommy because he’s interesting, even if Quackity tells him that Wilbur cares about him. Wilbur and Quackity and Niki will never be Dream and Sapnap and George.

Maybe the Room was right. Maybe he doesn’t have a place in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy is very confused :(

Thank you for your comments, kudos and interactions! You better be taking care of yourselves... that’s not a threat, it’s a promise <<33

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Dropping hints, sprinkling them in :)

TW// mention of child death, mention of blood and injury, very brief mention to suicidal ideation, past brainwashing, past abuse, hallucinations, weaponry, swearing

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Gunshots ricochet off the rock as Dream slams Theseus into the ground. Beside them, George sits up and fires. Three shots, three bodies hitting the floor.

“I’m running out of bullets,” he calls over the gunfire, dropping down beside them as a bullet passes too close for comfort. Wordlessly, Theseus holds out his own gun. George takes it with a nod.

Dream has his eyes closed, fingers pressing into the dirt. Quietly, he asks, “where’s the majority of them?”

“East,” Theseus says, senses alerting him to the danger. “Two hundred yards. There’s seventeen of them.”

George sits up over the hill, firing two more shots, two more bodies fall. He drops the gun and grabs Theseus’.

“Dream,” he breathes. “Now would be a great time-“

The ground explodes. Theseus twists to watch as the soil rises into a blockade, screams echoing over the hillside. Dream grabs his jacket, tugging him away.

They sprint over an incline, heading for the forest. Shots echo behind them and Dream clenches his fist, not looking back. Once again, the ground explodes, creating a mudslide that washes the remaining pursers away.

Firmly hidden in the forest, Theseus begins to slow.

“I think I’d rather be with Sapnap.” George mutters.

Dream laughs as Theseus stretches his senses out, searching for the car. Something makes him turn his head and as he walks in that direction, the other two follow, trusting him.

“Your complexion would not last in a desert, George.”

“At least I’m not pretending to be an American.”

Theseus rolls his eyes. “There’s someone by the car. To your right. Can we maybe, I don’t know, focus on the mission?”

“Yeah, George,” Dream pitches his voice higher as George lifts his hand, making direct eye contact with Dream as he shoots. The person falls. “Focus on the mission.”

“Oh, I definitely prefer Sapnap.”

Theseus finds himself laughing as he settles in the back, listening to them bicker up front.

“I hope you’re not intending to jump,” a voice calls and Tommy sighs, swinging his legs as he pats the place beside him.

“No,” he says, Russian accent firmly in place, “is there a reason I never see Morningstar?”

The Angel of Death, or as Tommy has discovered, Wilbur’s adoptive father Phil, steps closer. Tommy doesn’t move, even as the man settles beside him, legs hanging over the edge, black wings curled up at his back.

If Tommy is going down, he’s going down with information. He’s decided instead of fighting it, instead of running and never looking back, he’s going to find out what this family is about.

To him, it’s absurd but maybe that’s just L’Manberg’s influence. It’s not like anything they do can be worse than what he’s experienced.

Plus, having a connection with both the Heroes and Villains in the city may pay off for Tommy.

It’s always good to have powerful people on your side.

“He doesn’t patrol these districts,” Phil says. Now that Tommy is paying attention, he can hear Phil in his voice. “He patrols closer to the Heroes skyscraper.”

“Causing mischief?” Tommy asks.

Phil snorts. “You could say that. Vulpes? You heard of him? That’s who Morningstar likes to bother.”

Tommy hums, leans back on his hands. He runs the risk of Phil seeing his eyes like this but the contacts should limit some of the exposure. Either way, he’s going to exploit this relationship as much as possible.

Especially with the way his mind seems to be crumbling.

He originally assumed it was something minor like a sickness now he’s away from his home country but then it only got worse. He’s seeing Dream more and more and now he can also

hear Sapnap and George. His mind also seems to be finding random things to send him into a meltdown.

He needs to find a way to stop them, to shut off Dream's voice, even if he longs to hear it.

His mind is important: it keeps him alive. If he starts crumbling, he is but a deer with an injured leg: prey.

He is a Huntsman. He refuses to be weak.

"And you like to bother me," Tommy replies with a smile.

Phil laughs. "You've met the Blood God and that didn't go well, did it? I'm worried Morningstar would scare you off considering the whole compelling thing."

Tommy tilts his head in agreement. He does like his secrets. "I suppose you're not that bad."

"You seem chattier," Phil comments and Tommy tenses as a wing settles behind him, feathers rustling next to his ears. "Everything okay?"

Tommy looks to his hands and shrugs. "I- Trigger spoke to me and I realised some things."

"Yeah?" Phil seems intrigued, slightly annoyed and Tommy has the feeling Quackity isn't the only one getting jealous.

"I was taught some things," he tells Phil, "and I'm starting to see that I may have been lied to."

Phil turns to look at him. "Like what?"

"The world isn't as cruel as I expected." Tommy makes a gesture to Phil. "The people are nicer."

"Thank you," Phil murmurs and then snorts. "I never would've thought I'd get a compliment like that considering I'm a Villain."

Tommy rolls his eyes. "I thought you'd act more... villainous? I thought the Heroes would instantly try to arrest me but neither has happened. It's confusing."

Phil pauses for a little while, digesting Tommy's words before asking, "have you tried a psychiatrist?"

Tommy rapidly shakes his head. "I'm not letting anyone near my mind."

Not again. Never again. He doesn't mind trying to get connection from these strange individuals around him but he refuses to let someone mess with his mind.

Not now that he's free.

“Okay, okay,” Phil holds up his hands in a surrender and as Tommy sits there, Phil’s wings slowly pushes closer, as if to draw him near. “No psychiatrists. I’d still suggest talking to someone.”

“They wouldn’t understand.” Tommy replies.

“If you keep bottling everything up, it’s going to bubble up into something you can’t control,” Phil warns and Tommy shrugs.

“I’ll be fine.” Tommy says, wills himself to believe it.

He will survive this. Tommy is a survivor, it’s practically in his DNA. He doesn’t give up and he doesn’t give in. Through all the trials and tribulations, Tommy kept going.

Twenty-eight to one.

“You did a number on the Blood God,” Phil says, calmly, clearly trying to keep Tommy seated beside him. “He mentioned that you didn’t like the idea of a job.”

Tommy rolls his eyes, kicking his legs harder. He wonders if maybe once he moves on from L’Manberg, he should try and find that forest again, the one that taught him how to zone out.

It would be soft, easy. He could fish and hunt. He could be by himself.

“Trigger asked the same thing,” he replies. “I work alone.”

“Bad bosses?” Phil asks and Tommy has to cough to hide his laugh.

“You could say that.”

He did always prefer when one of the Huntsman was his Handler. They were more laidback with him. Sure, the punishments were severe but so were the ones with the teachers.

“I-“ Tommy pauses, thinks it through and then says, “I knew someone with wings, once.”

Phil cocks his head. “What happened?”

His tone is soft, concerned. He knows it’s not a good story.

Tommy remembers a boy from his class. He remembers when they were older, maybe twelve, and the boy collapsed in the middle of an English lesson.

Giant red wings had sprouted from his back, blood pouring onto the wooden floor.

Up until that point, Tommy considered him a threat, and a big one at that. He was an exceptional fighter, one that even Dream had to watch him during sparring sessions.

But then he had wings and a lack of a flock. His balance was skewed and he couldn’t stop the involuntary chirps, the way he needed to be around people.

Tommy ended up shooting him down in spring, red feathers falling like blood as he fell. The woman with the black hair had ordered it, had been so proud when Tommy followed through. He did not mourn.

That's when the woman's theory of him was confirmed.

He doesn't like to think about it, his own back aching at the memory.

"His wings were like Icarus'," Tommy says, quietly. "He fell like him, too."

Phil sucks in a breath, wings fluttering in distress. A strange chirp leaves Phil's lips. Tommy tenses at the noise and instinctively leans a bit closer before catching himself.

"Sorry," he says and Phil shakes himself.

"It's- I'm sorry for your loss," Phil says and Tommy frowns before realising he thinks Tommy is mourning.

Tommy doesn't mourn. He couldn't in the Room and now their deaths don't seem to register to him. He doesn't know their names, just their numbers.

He was five. That's what the teachers used. Names, in the room, were precious. Only his Handlers knew his name.

Those twenty-eight boys are nothing but bones now, some in Siberia, some in other countries, some in the unmarked graves.

Tommy shakes himself from those thoughts as feathers brush his back.

Could it even be counted as a loss when he was the one pulling the trigger?

"How do you do it?" He asks, suddenly, thoughts racing through his mind as his heart pounds. "How do cope with being a Villain, with killing people?"

Phil cocks his head, considers his question. "It was hard in the beginning, to take a life but I'm the Angel of Death for a reason. It began to blur. I suppose I just don't think about it. Compartmentalise it all."

The Room taught that. Put everything, every emotion, every problem, in a box in the mind and ignore it, do not let it out. Tommy was good at it.

It seems more of him is starting to unravel.

"Why?" Phil asks after a moment. "You seem pretty confident with a gun."

Tommy doesn't remember all of the people he's killed. Some, he knows, have been stripped from his mind, memories wiped, deleted, rewritten.

"I don't know anymore." Tommy says, looking up to stare at the stars. "I feel like a child again. I'm so unsure about everything. I don't know what's a lie and what's not. I can't tell

what's true anymore."

His reality is blurring at the edges.

He knows he's a Huntsman. He knows he was trained in the Room. He knows Dream and George and Sapnap.

But were they brothers? Did he ever fail a mission? Why did the woman like him so much? Who was his primary Handler?

He doesn't seem to know the truths of his past from the lies.

"I can't trust my own mind," he whispers.

Then, it hits Tommy. He's revealing his secrets, his weaknesses, not only to someone he doesn't know, but to the most powerful Villain in L'Manberg, maybe the world.

He tenses, panicked. His back is aching and his hands are shaking.

He never broke like this at the Room. He survived their interrogation lessons, he kept his mouth shut. Is this all it takes for Tommy to break, a kind presence and a listening ear?

"Little spider," Dream whispers in his mind and he shudders. "Stop panicking. You haven't mentioned anything incriminating."

Tommy tries to grip onto Dream's voice, longing for him to be beside him.

"Go to the forest," Dream commands. "Go to the forest and breathe."

Tommy closes his eyes - dangerous, stupid, what with Phil right next to him - and relaxes his body. He thinks of the rustle of leaves, the bird calls, the trickle of the stream.

His back stops hurting, his hands stop shaking.

"Are you okay?" Phil asks, hands resting on his knees and keeping still.

Tommy opens his eyes. "I think I'm going to leave."

Tommy stands and Phil's wing pulls back. It's comforting to know Tommy won't be stopped. He steps away from the edge, deciding he's going to walk the long way home.

"Theseus," Phil calls and Tommy pauses, looks over his shoulder to see Phil still sitting over the edge. "Keep your secrets but know I'm here to listen if you need someone to."

"You're a Villain," Tommy reminds him. "Telling my weaknesses to a Villain isn't how I want to die."

"Then I swear on my life I mean you no harm." Phil says, vehemently and Tommy blinks at him, shocked.

"Even though I don't want to work for you?"

“We can work together.” Phil says, wings dipping down only to arch back up. “Or you can work with the Heroes. Just know, I’m not out to kill you or catch you.”

Tommy studies him for a second before nodding. It’s not like he can fight off a man that can’t die. Phil may be learning about him but Tommy is also using this as an opportunity to learn about Phil, too.

“One more thing,” Phil calls, voice strained but gentle and Tommy tenses at the tone. “The last time I was in Russia, I heard about a program.”

Tommy’s entire body locks and suddenly he’s surrounded by Dream, George and Sapnap. They’re watching Phil, eyes dark.

“I was at the ballet,” Phil continues, “and during the interlude, one of the ballerinas tried to kill a member of my family. Yet when I spoke about it to the Russian Government, they seemed to have no recollection of a program ever existing. We chased her half-way across Europe, only to lose track of her in Belarus.”

“Breathe,” George hisses and Tommy relaxes his shoulders, evens his breaths.

Phil cocks his head to Tommy. “She spoke multiple languages, had multiple identities and was able to take said family member in a fight, nearly killing them. You said you were from Volgograd, so you might have heard some things. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that woman?” Phil shifts his body and Tommy can feel his stare, digging into his very soul. “Or, as we found out through some Bratva sources, do you know anything about that Black Widow?”

“Tell him the truth that you know,” Sapnap says. “Keep it succinct.”

Dream’s hand drops onto his shoulder and Tommy finds himself shaking his head.

“The Black Widows are ghost stories to frighten young children,” Tommy tells him. “Eat your greens or the Black Widow will come for you.”

Phil doesn’t move, doesn’t twitch. “And the program?”

Tommy shakes his head. “I can’t help you there, sorry.”

Phil waves him off. “It’s alright. It’s just- you remind me of her, I thought-“

Tommy nearly chokes. Dream’s hand squeezes tighter. “Calm, little spider,” he whispers and Tommy shudders, mind burning.

“I’m not a ballerina,” Tommy says and it should come off as a joke but it falls flat to his ears.

By the time he makes it to the ground, away from Phil’s plague mask, he is alone.

There's a reason there are very few older Huntsman. Only one of twenty-eight is allowed to survive but also once free, some of them seem to break after they speak with the woman with the black hair.

There's also Dream's part to play in that, though Theseus never finds out why.

He hears some passing comments.

Sapnap says while hiding out in a Quebec safe house, "L'Manberg is a lawless place. Dream... Dream came back wrong."

"What do you mean wrong?" Theseus asks, huddling closer for warmth.

Sapnap stares at the fire before them without the usual joy. "He didn't come back so they sent some of us after him. They never came back either until George. After they returned, we didn't see him for a month. He would be in the chair for hours at a time."

"He seems fine," Theseus says and Sapnap sighs.

"The chair fixed him."

They don't speak about it again and Theseus only brings it up to Dream, months later on a mission.

"Why are we taught and sent everywhere but I've only ever heard the rumours about L'Manberg?"

Dream pauses beside him, something strange, something oddly flat in his gaze. "I had a complicated mission. I- It's difficult to remember."

Two days later, Theseus finds himself in the chair, conversations about L'Manberg being stripped from his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Sooooooooo, thoughts?? I love reading your comments and finding out what you think :)

Thank you all for your support!! Take care of yourselves <3

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

This one is a bit short, sorry lads but bonding so :)

TW// child death, blood and injury, brainwashing, manipulation, past abuse, scar mention, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy !!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Black Widows are graceful in their dance. Dipping low and pirouetting with an ease that only dancers who have danced their entire lives have.

“Huntsman Spiders do not build webs to catch their prey,” the teacher tells them as they watch the Black Widows dance to Swan Lake. “They, as their name suggests, hunt their prey. Camouflaging themselves or hiding in plain sight, they will wait for an opportunity to strike before hunting their prey at speed.”

Theseus watches the way they move around one another. It’s quick and light, practiced movements that flow.

There are no mistakes in this dance. They all jump to the same height, all twirl in unison. It’s almost as if they breathe as one.

“The Black Widows are the opposite,” the teacher continues. “They lure their prey into webs, constructed of the finest silk. To get their name, the female spiders will mate before killing and eating their male counterpart.”

The Black Widows fall to a stop, the music stilling. They pause in their positions as the ballet master looks over them with a sharp eye.

“Again,” he commands in Russian and the women fall back into their starting positions.

The dance continues.

“Your training is mostly the same,” the teacher says as the Black Widows rise behind him. “Apart from one noticeable difference. Huntsman are trained to hunt, Widows are trained to seduce. Either way, only one of you will make the rank.”

There are fifteen Widows left. There are twelve Huntsman left.

Later, when Tommy is alone with the woman with the black hair, watching the new recruits file into the room, he will breathe, “you’ll break them.”

The woman will smile that hungry smile. “Only the breakable ones. You are made of marble.”

Tommy’s not ignoring Wilbur or his Villain family. He’s not. Sure, he may have tried to go to Niki’s for her desserts, only to spot Wilbur and Technoblade through the glass, and so took off down the street in a sprint. That doesn’t mean he’s ignoring them.

He needs time.

He needs space.

So he sticks to Las Nevadas and stops patrolling for a week.

It means by three days in, he can’t sleep, waking up with jarring memories but he refuses to rush this. He needs to come to terms with his situation.

Quackity and Las Nevadas is a morally grey area, frequented by Heroes and Villains alike.

Wilbur, Phil and Technoblade are the big three when it comes to Villains and for some reason, they’re hell-bent on Tommy joining both their family and their ranks.

Phil knows about the Room, or at least, he knows about the Black Widows. It’s a problem, one Tommy doesn’t know how to fix but hopefully if he keeps silent about the subject, Phil won’t mention it again.

The Captain and Trigger seem to be offering their own type of help, wanting him to turn over a new leaf and follow in their footsteps. They want him to be a Hero.

Tommy doesn’t know what to make of it all. He doesn’t know who he can trust.

But he wants to trust someone.

The thought makes him shake, slightly. Huntsman don’t trust. He is supposed to be independent, he is supposed to look after himself.

But he wants that connection. He misses Dream. He misses George. He misses Sapnap.

They’re not here though. He’s alone here. So he might as well branch out.

He stares at the phone Wilbur gave him. It sits on his kitchen counter for three days. He should call, should ask them to meet. He already misses the contact they shared.

Wilbur will never be Dream, or George, or Sapnap. Tommy doubt their connection will ever, could ever be that strong. They weren’t pushed together by a horrible world, they met under semi-normal circumstances.

But Tommy wants a brother again.

Despite everything the Room made him live through, he was rarely alone - apart from the three months in solitary. Sure, many of his classmates died but he was still around people constantly.

Tommy doesn't want to be alone. He doesn't want to go to a silent apartment and wake to a silent apartment. He can't handle it.

So maybe he stares at the phone and considers calling. Maybe he wants Wilbur to call first.

It seems the world has a different plan for him.

He's midway through his lunch - rice and chicken - when the phone rings. At first, he freezes, staring at the device like it's somehow a bomb.

He wouldn't be surprised. Sapnap liked explosions.

Slowly, he reaches over and presses the answer button. He's surprised that it's not Wilbur's voice.

"Boss man!" Tubbo shouts through the phone. "Are you free today? What are your plans? Do you like ice cream?"

Tommy blinks. "Uh, hi, Tubso. Yes to the first question. I have no plans to the second and I do like ice cream. Why? What's fucking happening?"

"Ranboo and Techno are hiking or some shit and I don't want to leave the house so I thought you could come 'round? I mean, I never gave you the house tour."

Tommy pauses, chews on a mouthful of rice. "Uh," he says. "Just us?"

"Yep!"

"Wilbur didn't put you up to this, did he?"

"What? Why would-" Tubbo pauses and then a short laugh echoes down the line. "So you're the reason he's been sulking, huh?"

"He's been sulking?" Tommy asks and then quickly adds, "how'd you even get this number?"

"Well, I found out Wil was sulking when I asked him for your number, 'cause he told me he gave you a phone. Especially since Niki said she hasn't seen you." Tubbo huffs down the line, voice intrigued. "Did he- did Wilbur say something?"

Tommy looks down at his rice and chicken. "He thinks I'm interesting and I'd rather not hang around someone who's only using me as a fucking science experiment."

Tubbo pauses and then says, "Tommy, Wilbur is worried about you. I've never seen him like this with someone other than his family. I think- I think he actually gives a shit about you."

“But-“ Tommy tries and Tubbo’s quick to cut him off.

“I know you don’t trust easy but Wilbur doesn’t involve himself with just anyone. You matter to him. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.” Tubbo takes another pause. “He’s not the only one who cares. Everyone’s asking about you, man. You good?”

Tommy puts his fork down. Is this what having a friend is like? Does Wilbur actually care? Did he mistake Quackity’s words and hear them more from the perspective of a jealous businessman?

“Yeah,” Tommy says after clearing his throat. “I’m good. Just- I’m- it’s complicated.”

“Well, my door is always open.” Tubbo says and Tommy lets his forehead hit the counter. “You might want to check in on Niki, too. She’s worried about you.”

“Fuck.” Tommy breathes. He likes Niki, he doesn’t want to concern her when she’s only ever been nice to him. “I’ll meet you at Niki’s?”

“Sure, boss man.”

The line falls dead and Tommy tries to swallow the rest of his meal in four bites before discarding the empty paper plate in the bin. Sometimes his own - Sapnap’s - genius baffles him, especially when he hates washing up.

Grabbing a jacket and a knife (plus the throwing stars in his boots) he leaves his apartment and heads over to Niki’s Bakery. He feels angry at himself that in trying to dodge Wilbur and his family, he’s been inadvertently worrying Niki.

Fifteen minutes later, he stands in front of her bakery, smile crawling up onto his face.

He’s missed her cafe, missed her.

He pushes the door open, the bell chiming his entrance. She looks up from where she’s pouring what looks to be a latte and grins at him.

“Tommy!” She greets and his own smile widens.

“Niki!” He replies in the same tone. “Hi!”

“What brings you to my bakery today, Tommy?”

“Tubbo said you’re worried about me,” Tommy says, leaning to place his palms on the counter, dropping his head to rest there, looking up at her with puppy-dog eyes.

She rolls her eyes, lips quirking. “You didn’t show up, of course I was worried.”

“Don’t worry about me, Niki, I’m a big man,” he says with a smile even as she frowns at him. “I can look after myself.”

“You don’t need to,” she says. “I know you’re not the most trusting but take it from experience: these people care and they’ll listen and they won’t judge.”

“But they won’t understand,” he replies and then shakes himself, standing up straight. He notices how clean her surfaces are and is impressed. So the Minecraft’s may be utterly disorganised but at least their friends are orderly.

“Try them,” Niki says with a shrug. “They may not have lived through what you have but they’ve lived strange lives.”

Tommy looks at her and doesn’t know how to explain that it’s not about getting rejected, it’s about the look of horror when they find out. It’s about when they say he was responsible for killing someone they know or another Huntsman or Widow was. It’s about seeing the openness and care they’re giving him now, dissolve in front of his eyes.

Most of all, it’s the fear that they will send him back.

Tommy’s tasted freedom and he’s willing to go to drastic measures to keep this fragile peace he’s created for himself.

Niki seems to sense his distress and reaches over, gently grabbing his hand. “Or try me. I’m always here for you, Tommy. I would never judge you.”

He looks at her with wide eyes. “And I’m a bad person? What about then?”

She smiles, soft yet sharp. “Then you’re not the only bad person in the room. It would be wrong of me to judge you when my life hasn’t exactly been the nicest.”

Tommy stares at her, relishing in the contact, baffled by the turn of events. He knew she was aware of the Minecraft’s criminal lifestyle but maybe he needs to do some digging on her, too.

Behind him, the bell chimes. Tubbo flutters in, grin to his lips.

“Tommy! Honestly didn’t think you’d come.”

He frowns over at the shorter boy. “Why?”

“You’re very twitchy,” Tubbo replies. “Like you’re always prepared to run at the drop of a hat.”

“Tubbo,” Niki cautions and the boy smiles at her, innocently.

“Sorry, Tommy, but it’s true! I thought Ranboo was bad.”

“Tubbo,” Tommy says, slowly. “I’m having the odd desire to stab you right now.”

Tubbo frowns at him as Niki hides her giggle into her hand. “That’s not nice.”

“Then don’t ever compare me to the fucking boob boy again, okay?”

Tubbo grins at him, antennae twitching back and forth. “Understood, man. But maybe if you didn’t act like him-“

“Bye, Niki!” Tommy calls as he stalks out of her cafe, smiling as he hears the bell chime twice.

“Wait! Wait!” Tubbo flies over beside him, matching his strides by flying a brief distance with every step. “You’re still coming ‘round right?”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “I have nothing better to do with my day, so yes.”

“Cool,” Tubbo says and after a minute of silence, adds, “did you seriously memorise where I live?”

Tommy ducks his head. “Uh, in the less creepy way possible, yes?”

Tubbo grins at him. “I can see why Wilbur likes you. You’re weird.”

“You’re fucking weird!” Tommy snaps back but Tubbo just laughs at him, wings fluttering with the sound.

“No, I’m awesome.”

“You’re a bitch.”

“You’re a bitch.”

“I will stab you.”

Tubbo scoffs. “Where’s the knife then? I will literally sting you.”

Tommy has never felt the need to flip the knife out from his pocket this intensely before but, god, he can imagine Tubbo’s surprise. The image alone sustains him as they approach Tubbo’s house.

“I’ve been told that you know about the family business,” Tubbo says as he unlocks his front door and Tommy nods.

“I work for Quackity so criminal shit isn’t really an issue,” he replies.

Tubbo grins at him, wings fluttering. “Oh, nice. Big Q and I are friends. I hack into his rivals’ companies and crash their sites.”

Tommy blinks at him. “Seriously? I’ve never been that good at hacking.”

A half-lie. Tommy had to be good or he’d die but unlike George, who took to technology like a fish to water, Tommy could never understand it like him.

He can still hack into the government’s documents though so he supposes he’s not that bad.

“You’ve tried?” Tubbo asks and Tommy nods.

“Yeah, I’m trying to find a hobby.” He shrugs. “I can sew and garden but there’s no space for any plants in my apartment and I have no reason to sew anymore.”

Sewing was a mandatory lesson but gardening was something he picked up from behind alone. He likes plants but after trying to sustain big pots in his apartment, he quit. The lack of light and little space made caring for them very difficult.

Tubbo tilts his head, antennae flicking. “So now it’s crime?”

Tommy laughs, caught off guard. Tubbo’s smile is wide at the sound. “Uh, yeah,” Tommy says, feeling light. “I suppose crime is now the answer.”

It’s strange, how at ease these people make Tommy feel. Sure, Technoblade and Phil give him warning bells in his head but he assumes that’s purely instinctual. The same as how Tommy saw Wilbur and could sense some type of threat on him, but has yet to see him in his Villain getup and so can’t rationalise the kind man on the bench with Morningstar, the Villain.

These people are smart and kind and something soft fills Tommy when around them.

In the Room, he killed to survive. Attachments were dangerous. Friendships leads to complacency and complacency leads to death.

But here, in L’Manberg, it’s not the rules of the jungle. The fittest survive but so do the weakest.

Wilbur and Ranboo mentioned that Phil has adopted all of the boys. Unlike the Room, that would take those children and break them, would watch them die, Phil created a family that clearly loves each other.

It’s confusing but slowly, Tommy thinks he’s starting to understand what Wilbur meant about alone being death.

“House tour?” Tubbo asks and Tommy nods, allows himself to be led around the house.

It’s beautiful, and much more orderly than the Minecraft’s. Soft blues and greys, the cinema room, a giant kitchen filled with appliances, land stretched out behind the house filled with flowers and vegetables.

Much like the Minecraft’s, Tubbo’s staircase is filled with picture frames of him and Ranboo, some intertwined with Phil, Technoblade and Wilbur.

“And this,” Tubbo says, “is Ranboo’s room.”

Tommy looks inside and is met with a strict colour palette of black, white and purple. The room is practically spotless: nothing out of place, everything at the right angle. A cat lies across his striped bed, next to a stuffed bat plushie, all black with bright yellow eyes. There’s a dog bed next to his desk and a bookshelf filled with what looks like diaries.

“Hello, Enderchest,” Tubbo coos, though it sounds more like a buzz and the cat lazily blinks up at him before curling back up.

“What’s with the books?” Tommy asks and Tubbo smiles, reaching over to scratch behind Enderchest’s ears.

“Ranboo has a bad memory,” Tubbo says. “So he writes everything down. Like he said when you met, he doesn’t remember anything before Phil.”

Tommy frowns, an odd feeling spilling from his chest. Sympathy? He wouldn’t know but it feels strange.

“That’s shit,” Tommy comments and Tubbo laughs.

“That’s one way to put it.”

After another scratch, Tubbo flutters away from Enderchest and back through the door. Tommy looks around the room, something off about it, before following Tubbo.

Back into the hallway, Tubbo pushes open a door and spreads his arms. “This is my room.”

Tubbo’s is the complete opposite of Ranboo’s. It’s brighter - all yellows and oranges, like a sunflower in bloom - and there are plants on the windowsill, on his desk, vines climbing the walls. The bed is covered with stuffed animals.

Tommy raises his eyebrows at the sight and Tubbo catches his gaze, doesn’t even look embarrassed. “They help me sleep.”

“Oh?”

“I never had any personal belongings at the orphanage and when Phil first found me, the first thing he gave me was a stuffed bee.” Tubbo gestures to his collection. “I’ve been collecting them ever since.”

“It’s impressive.” Tommy idly comments, shocked.

Even as a child, none of them were allowed stuffed toys or any type of toy. His first toy was probably a switch blade Sapnap gave him when he turned eleven.

He couldn’t have childish things. The Room took children and shattered their innocence. In there, he was never allowed to be a child.

“Want one?” Tubbo asks, fluttering over to rifle through the pile. “Ranboo stole Batthew and Techno has a pig, I think. Wilbur had a bunny rabbit but Avondeten was ripped apart after Fundy pissed him off.”

Tommy blinks. “He called a stuffed rabbit ‘evening meal’?”

Tubbo pauses. “You know Dutch?”

Tommy wills himself not to freeze. “Uh, you know I said about hobbies? Languages seem to be my thing.”

Tubbo grins at him. “That’s cool! I’m pretty sure Niki is a polyglot so you can totally conspire against us in secret.”

Tommy rolls his eyes but his chest eases. He knows Niki has a German accent but being able to speak multiple languages means he might have to be careful. Frankly, Tommy doesn’t know how many languages he knows. It’s enough that even if he doesn’t quite understand one, if he listens long enough, he can start to pick up the general gist.

“So,” Tubbo gains his attention. “Which one do you want?”

“I’m a big man, I don’t need a stuffed animal.” Tommy says, willing himself not to go soft even as he spots an animal he definitely wants.

“Tommy,” Tubbo says, sitting down on his bed. “Having a stuffed animal doesn’t make you strange or weird or whatever the fuck you’re thinking. It’s a comfort thing, something that can be there when other people can’t. If you don’t want one, that’s fine, but you don’t have to pretend. I’m not going to judge you. This is my collection.”

Tommy pauses, swallows. Watching Tubbo like this is a test and the minute he decides, he’ll be forced to watch the boy rip the toy from his hands and destroy it, he steps closer.

He reaches for a stuffed cow, white with brown spots, and picks it up. It’s light in his hands, soft to the touch.

“What’re you going to name them?” Tubbo asks.

Tommy swallows again, clears his throat. “Henry.”

“Henry,” Tubbo repeats and then nods. “Good name. Want to go and watch TV?”

For the duration of his stay, Tommy holds Henry like he’s something breakable, something delicate. Tubbo makes no move to take him back, barely even acknowledging that Tommy is holding him.

It eases something in Tommy’s chest, allows him to breathe easier.

He may not have been a child for a long time but Henry with his black eyes and brown spots makes Tommy feel like the child he should’ve been. It makes him feel raw, edges frayed but in a good way.

When he leaves, Henry gripped in his hands, he smiles at Tubbo and realises he had a good time.

“Thank you,” he whispers and Tubbo grins at him.

“I’m free all week. I can always shove Ranboo in his room if you want to hang out.”

Tommy heads to his apartment, stuffed cow in hand and smiles as tears gather in his eyes.

Maybe he can heal.

There is a final assessment before becoming a Huntsman.

Theseus is one of three remaining out of the original twenty-eight. He still does not know the boys' names. They are but numbers to him, they are but obstacles in his way.

The final assessment is the hardest, is the one that unearths the strong from the weak.

The room is a large, circular shape. The outer ring has been elevated for people to watch but they do not matter in the grand scheme of things. This is not a test of his flawlessness, of his grace, of his timing; this is a test of his survival capabilities.

In the centre, Dream stands, shoulders relaxed, green eyes alert.

He has been wiped - those memories will be given back at the end of the exercise - and so he does not recognise any of them, only Eret, his Handler.

The first boy that goes against him dies almost instantly. Wood encases him, piercing his skin until his blood pools across the floor.

The second boy survives, if only barely. He has a broken arm and a nasty cut across his cheek, down his neck to his collarbone.

Dream remains unchanged bar the sweat and bleeding knuckles.

This test can go either two ways: kill Dream before he can get to killing him or survive for twenty minutes.

It's sounds easy but there's one part they don't mention until they're in the room with Dream: he can use his abilities however he pleases. So there may not be a gun to his forehead or a knife to his ribs but Theseus will have to compete against the best Huntsman, who also has access to all of his elemental powers. A Huntsman that does not recognise him and so will not pull his punches.

It does mean, however, that Theseus can use his abilities, too.

"Theseus," Eret calls, the woman by their shoulder. "Ready?"

Theseus steps up. He walks to the centre to stand opposite Dream and they both bow in respect to one another.

If he can do this, he knows he can easily kill the other boy. This is the final obstacle, the final test.

Theseus is nothing but a number now but he will be a Huntsman. He will survive.

"Go," Eret says.

Twenty minutes later, Theseus is picking wood from his leg, rolling his wrist to make sure it's not broken, realigning his nose. His back aches as he shifts and he spits blood.

Before him, Dream lies on the ground, eyes dazed as blood drips from the cut Theseus just gave him. He wonders, briefly, if that's something the doctors will be able to fix or if it will scar.

Either way, it doesn't matter.

That night, he will wait in the shadows of the shower room and snap the other boy's neck. The guards will find him and he will be congratulated, not punished.

He is crowned as the official Huntsman Spider of his generation.

Twenty-eight to one.

Theseus survives.

Then, a little less than a month later, after spending his vacation time setting Semtex underneath the Room's buildings, he gets into a car and watches the Room go up in flames.

He will ditch the car in Ukraine along with the tracker he picks out from the flesh of his hip. He will find a contact and access his forged documents. He will ponder where to run and remember an inkling of a memory.

Theseus will become Tommy, a British eighteen year old and he will make his way to America, to L'Manberg.

Tommy survives.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy's past amiright? ;)

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions! Take care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Some hints, some revelations ;)

TW// mention of child death, past abuse, gore and violence, mention of child torture, body horror, blood and injury, weaponry, past brainwashing mention, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil settles beside Techno as Wilbur says, “well, I think it’s pretty clear Theseus was from that program.”

“Why, because he’s not patrolling?” Ranboo asks, laying spread out across the floor, Enderchest purring as he circles him.

“I’m worried I scared him away,” Phil breathes, wings flexing. “Especially since Sam mentioned he’s willing to leave at any point.”

“Somethings telling me he’s not left yet,” Techno says and shrugs when they all look to him. “Just intuition.”

Wilbur leans closer, practically draping himself over Techno. Phil smiles when Techno tries to push him away, watching as Wilbur flails.

“I can’t wait to meet him,” he says, once he’s secured himself by latching onto Techno’s elbow, eyes vicious as he glares at his older brother. “I mean, he’s asking about me!”

Phil still frowns. “He was so talkative. I hope I haven’t made him run.”

“Dad,” Wilbur sighs. “I’m sure it’s nothing-“

“That’s putting it lightly,” Tubbo says, fingers typing away. “There’s nothing. I literally can’t find anything.”

In Tubbo’s house, he has a room filled with computer screens and Phil may know some about the program in Russia but not enough. It’s always a good idea to have a hacker on his side.

“Not even in the government files?” Techno asks and Tubbo shakes his head.

“This program doesn’t exist.” Tubbo confirms, looks up to Phil. “Do you have a name for this program? I’ve tried young operatives being turned into killers and even ballerinas but it’s

a dead end.”

Phil shakes his head before pausing. He remembers a conversation after the ballet incident, remembers watching as the person he knew switched into a cold-blooded killer.

“Try Room.”

Tubbo frowns but turns back to the screen. He tries again as Wilbur leans over to help decipher the Russian on Tubbo’s screen. For a second, nothing pops up and then-

“Oh?” Wilbur leans in. “My Russian is dodgy but it looks like they’re talking about spiders?”

“Spiders?” Techno asks as Ranboo sits up.

“I think, I know that says black-“

“Black Widows,” Phil says for him, the name too-familiar. He’s definitely going to have to have a meeting after this.

Wilbur spares him a look before nodding, turning back to the documents. “The Red Room is a school to teach young orphans the blessed nature of dance. Through gruelling lessons pushing the boundaries of the bodies, the students will learn discipline and order,” Wilbur reads out.

“That totally doesn’t sound suspicious,” Ranboo mutters, hand in Enderchest’s fur.

“There’s something here about a type of spider but I don’t know what that says,” Wilbur adds.

“You could run it by Niki,” Techno says. “She knows Russian.”

Phil sighs. “You know she doesn’t like to be involved-“

“Well,” Wilbur says, dark edge to his eyes. “Why don’t you call up that source of yours you’ve yet to tell us about?”

“I’m not involving them either,” Phil replies, firmly before softening his voice. “And I would tell you about what happened in Russia but I swear, unless they want to explain it, I’m not saying anything.”

“Killer ballerinas, Phil,” Techno says with an eye roll. “How is that something to not mention?”

Wilbur pouts over. “Even Niki won’t mention anything about it. I think she feels bad about the whole near-death experience after she suggested watching the ballet.”

Ranboo looks between them and says, “killer ballerinas? What?”

“You know,” Tubbo fills in. “When Phil went to hunt down any leads on you and Niki wanted to see Moscow, so she went along. Only for them to be attacked during a ballet

performance. Phil said they were just targeting him because of the whole Angel of Death thing but Wilbur thinks he's lying."

"Half a million," Wilbur mutters, points an accusing finger at Tubbo and then at Phil. "Half a million from our bank account and you and Niki disappearing for two weeks. That's not nothing, Tubbo."

Tubbo shrugs, wings fluttering behind him. "I'm not saying I believe his story, Wil, I'm just saying that if Phil felt it was important, he'd tell us. We all have secrets in this family, it's not a shock the immortal would want to have some bodily autonomy."

Wilbur's eyes shine as Techno snorts a laugh. Phil rolls his eyes. "Thanks, Tubbo," he says with heavy sarcasm and Tubbo grins at him in response.

For a moment, they sit there, Tubbo begins running a backup bit of software to try and decipher the Russian. After a few moments, English appears on the screen.

"Wilbur's translation seems to be mostly right," he says, eyes flicking over the screen. "A lot of it is blacked out and I think some of it is in code."

Wilbur eyes the screen. "Black Widows and Huntsman Spiders. Tech?"

"Black Widows eat their partner after mating and Huntsman Spiders don't make webs," Techno says. "Why are the Russians obsessed with-"

"Phil." Wilbur says, voice low. "We have a problem."

Phil readies himself, dread pooling in his stomach. He stands, wings flexing, curling close to his back.

He looks over his son's shoulder and stares at the screen. The entire page has been blacked out apart from the top-line, that has a rank, a name and a date, one from around seven months ago.

Huntsman Spider: Theseus

Phil swallows. "So he is a Huntsman Spider."

"Not anymore," Tubbo says and when they both look down at him, Tubbo gestures to his second screen, Phil realising that Tubbo's been typing the whole time. "Look, these pages all have dates signifying a weekly basis of activity. Up until a month after Theseus becomes a Huntsman Spider. Then it falls quiet."

"So he destroyed it and ran?" Techno asks, sitting forward with his head in his hands, crimson eyes intrigued.

Ranboo makes a warbling sound. "Why would he join an organisation only to destroy it?"

Wilbur shrugs. "Maybe his motives changed. I mean, you say that during your nightly meetings, he gets confused about why you're so nice to him, Phil. Maybe this Red Room

wasn't a good place to be."

"It would explain why he ran after you mentioned the Black Widows." Techno murmurs. "Does it mention any abilities?"

"No," Wilbur breathes. "All of its--"

"Oh shit," Tubbo breathes and all of their heads snap around at the sound. "Look!"

Phil leans closer, and senses Ranboo sitting closer, Techno approaching. With delicate hands, Techno shifts Phil's wings so that he can see.

Phil skims over the blackout lines and finds himself lingering on the words he can read.

"Las Nevadas," Wilbur speaks for them all. "Quackity's fiancé- he's one of them. He's a Huntsman Spider."

"The timeline fits," Techno speaks, leaning back. "Quackity started branching out after our fallout and found Nick. Only for the guy to disappear the minute Theseus becomes a Huntsman and all these pages stop being filed."

"So it's all connected?" Ranboo pipes up. "Theseus and Quackity's fiancé are apart of the same shadow organisation?"

"Looks like it," Tubbo says. "So what do we do now?"

Four sets of eyes turn to look at Phil and he sighs, mind racing.

He needs more information which means he needs to hold another meeting. Quackity should be told and someone should be there in case of any fallout.

"Tubbo, try and find as much information as you can," Phil starts. "Ranboo, make sure he hydrates--"

"I'm not that bad!" Tubbo buzzes at him, wings fluttering.

"Techno, Wil head to Las Nevadas to tell Quackity. Wil, get Fundy to tell Karl to come, he should know too." He pauses, thinks it over. "I'll go and tell Puffy. The quicker everyone knows, the better."

Wilbur nods, turns to call his son.

Phil always found it hilarious that his grandson turned out to be a Hero when he was considered the first Villain. Beautifully ironic.

"Be careful," Tubbo says. "I think Tommy will be there and if he sees you, he might connect the dots."

"Noted." Wilbur says as Phi grabs his mask.

He has a Hero to meet.

Theseus doesn't realise he's shaking until the man before him points it out, in a low tone. He blinks the haze, the forest he was hiding in, from his mind.

The man is speaking to him but Theseus can't hear him. Blood is dripping into his eye and he's losing sensation in his hands but he's alive, he's not breaking.

The man slaps him. His head snaps to the side. Coughing blood, he blinks rapidly as his chin is grabbed.

"Where is it?" The man shouts and Theseus reels back at the sudden noise. The hand at his chin, nails digging into his skin, holds him in place. "Tell me!"

Theseus opens his mouth, the man leans closer. He slams his forehead down on the man's nose, hearing the satisfying crack.

With a fingernail-less hand, Theseus catches the man's sleeve, pulling him closer as he jabs his knee up, into the man's stomach. He keels over, groaning and with his other hand, Theseus grabs the keys from his front pocket.

It takes him longer than he'd like to put the key in the lock and twist, allowing his arm to be free. He unlocks his other arm and stands on shaky legs.

If he steps on the man's chest as he leaves, well, no one has to know.

Dripping blood, he opens the door and is met with the wide-eyed stare of his teacher.

"How did you-?"

Theseus spits the blood in his mouth onto the white floor. Behind his teacher, George is watching him with a careful, sharp gaze. It is just them in the hallway, filled with more doors and more windows, each depicting his classmates torture.

"He was stupid," Theseus says, dangling the keys from his fingers. "I am not."

George throws his head back and laughs. It's the first time Theseus sees the Huntsman smile.

It's not the last.

Tommy sits by the Eiffel Tower at Las Nevadas, Punz's gold chains wrapped around his wrist. The phone sits heavy in his pocket, along with the gun in his waistband.

He wants to call Wilbur, he does but something is stopping him. He doesn't ever want to admit it's fear but Tommy has the strange urge to make these people like him.

Wilbur was so welcoming, so kind and Tommy wants that more than anything. He wants the easy laughter Tubbo gives and the smiles Niki hands out.

He wants connection.

And maybe, he wants to feel like he has brothers again.

Footsteps sound behind him and Tommy goes to tense before noticing the similar pattern to them. Purpled slips around the corner, hoodie covering his face as he hides behind the metal.

“You have them?”

Tommy grins at him, holds his arm out. Purpled mimics his grin with an eager stare, unwinding the gold and slipping the chains over his head.

From his backpack, he reaches in and hands Tommy the stacks of notes. “Pleasure doing business with you, Tommy.”

“Anytime,” Tommy replies, stuffing the money in his own backpack.

Purpled falls back into the shadows and disappears, his footsteps receding as Tommy sits there. It’s a quiet night in Las Nevadas but he supposes that’s because night has not yet begun.

There are a few couples walking around, some taking pictures beside the Eiffel Tower and Tommy spends a moment wondering if Quackity can replicate other buildings. He thinks Quackity could pull off a good Buckingham Palace or maybe even the Statue of Liberty.

He’s contemplating even trying the Taj Mahal when something rushes through him.

His entire body shudders, ripples and he feels frozen in place. He evens his breaths, grips his panic and presses it down. Panic is not needed in this situation.

He quickly realises he can’t move and as he looks around, he notices how everyone else has frozen too. Only their eyes aren’t wide with fear or concern. They’re empty, like they’re not even there.

Tommy moves his eyes to look at his fingers. Slowly, he tries to flex them until they twitch. He keeps his breaths even as feeling floods his body and at once he’s up, hand twitching for his gun.

The Huntsman takes over.

He lets the backpack fall to the ground behind him and drops his centre of gravity, walking silently across fake France and towards the main casino. He’ll try and find Quackity and stick with him.

The back doors and staff hallways are his best friend as he stalks through the halls and doors until he freezes in place outside of Quackity’s door, hearing a whimpering.

He swallows, thinks up a quick lie and pushes the door open.

He takes quick note of the entire room and pales at the situation in front of him. Quackity is frozen in his chair, hands covering his face. Beside him, sitting curled up on the desk, a man shudders, hair shifting with every cry. He's wearing a brightly coloured hoodie, filled with purples, blues and pinks.

Opposite them are Wilbur and Technoblade. Both frozen, both with sad expressions. In Technoblade's hand, a folder sits and Tommy nearly passes out at the title on the front page.

Red Room: Huntsman Spiders

But before he can hyperventilate himself to an early panic attack, the man on the desk looks up.

For a second, Tommy stares at the man and the man stares at Tommy. Shock passes between them.

"Uh, hi," Tommy says with a wave. "What the fuck is happening?"

The man blinks. "How are you not affected?"

And then it hits Tommy like a train. "Oh, are you- are you Chronos?"

"No," the man says with a nervous laugh. "I have no idea-"

"Oh fuck!" Tommy blinks, clicking his fingers, looking between him and Quackity. "You're Karl, aren't you?"

The man blinks at him. "Who are you?"

"Tommy," he replies, mind racing as he tries to ignore the glaringly obvious reason they're here. "I work for Quackity. You're his fiancé, right? Oh shit, is the wedding off? Did he break your heart because I'll gladly break his face-"

"No, no, no," Karl laughs. "It's not- Quackity and I are fine. You might be right about the wedding, though."

"Oh?"

Karl looks to Technoblade's hands. "Did Quackity tell you about Nick?"

Dread and fear curl in Tommy's stomach. He has a feeling he knows where this is going. "Yeah?"

"And you know about-"

"I work for Quackity, big K," Tommy says. "I'm aware of the illegal shit going on."

Karl nods, runs a hand through his hair and Tommy is momentarily stunned by the amount of rings on his fingers. "Well, Technoblade and Wilbur have told us that Nick might not have been Nick."

“And in response, you’ve proceeded to stop time?” Tommy asks, tries to still the panic in his veins and then frowns at the way he sways. “Is that why I feel weird?”

Karl looks at him with a strange look. “No one else has ever been able to move when I stop time so I can’t tell you if it’s normal or not.”

“Huh,” Tommy mutters, wiggles his fingers and toes. “This is like when my brother trapped me in ice.”

Karl laughs. “Yeah?”

It had been a training exercise. Well, it was supposed to be but Dream turned it into more of a game. Tommy still remembers the way Dream had held him when his lips started turning blue, the way Tommy clutched at him to get warm, even if this comfort was forbidden.

Tommy nods. “Minus three out of ten. Don’t recommend.” He shakes his head from the memory, looks up, meets Karl’s eyes. “I’m sorry about your fiancé. Is he like a spy or something?”

Tommy has no idea how much they know, how much the Room recorded. He knows his aliases are solid but his vigilante name, his past name, they might be written down.

He just hopes they never find out it’s him.

Karl shrugs. “All they know is that he works for this creepy Russian organisation. Most of the paperwork has been sharpied over so it’s difficult to understand. I think Nick was called Sapnap?”

Tommy’s breath catches.

Sapnap was here. Sapnap spent enough time here to have a relationship with Quackity and Karl. Sapnap was engaged.

And Tommy didn’t know. Was this the reason Sapnap stayed out longer on missions, why George would follow Sapnap around when he returned like he was concerned?

Did Sapnap love these men, even when it was forbidden? Is that why he spoke about being human and not a spider?

“Oh,” Tommy says and gives Karl a sad smile. “I’m sorry. I- if it’s any consolation, you can’t fake love.”

Karl gives him a teary smile. “Are you sure?”

Tommy swallows. “You can fake words and expressions but the body never lies. He- he might have been lying about a lot of things but I don’t think he’d lie about that.”

Tommy knows, if Sapnap didn’t care, they would be dead. His mission would be complete and he wouldn’t have spent unnecessary time away.

“Thank you,” Karl says, wiping at his eyes. “Seriously though, how are you doing this?”

Tommy shrugs, knows he means about walking around when he should be frozen in time like everyone else. “I’m awesome, that’s why.”

Karl laughs and then snuffles. “I really need a Monster.”

Tommy finds himself grinning. “And I should be going before you reverse this or whatever the fuck you do and I have to explain to my boss why I’m talking to his fiancé in secret.”

Karl rolls his eyes. “I can control time in a certain area - the whole world is exhausting - and then when I set time back, the world feels like nothing has changed in those hours, minutes, seconds. Time is mostly in flux anyway so,” he says, shrugging. “I don’t mess with the fixed points.”

“That made no sense.” Tommy mutters and Karl sighs.

“If Phil, for example, tried to ring Wilbur, of course it wouldn’t go through because time here is still. However, when I set time back, the phone call will reconnect and Phil will forget that brief period of time when that phone call didn’t connect because that timeline ends there.”

Tommy blinks. “Yeah, no. I’m good. I’d rather not have an existential crisis, thank you. Can you, like, not tell them about this? I really don’t want to explain to my boss-“

“I promise,” Karl says. “Have you considered getting tested for an ability?”

Tommy thinks of the drugs, of the needles, of the boys dead at his feet. He thinks of blood and sweat and tears. He thinks of red feathers and magenta eyes and struggling limbs.

He shakes his head. “Nah, I’m just cool.”

Karl studies him for a long second and then smiles at him, bright and warm. “It was nice to meet you, Tommy. You’re invited to the wedding... if it’s still on.”

Tommy smiles back, finds that it’s not fake. “You’re not a bitch, Karl.”

Karl laughs. “Thank you.”

Tommy pauses as he steps out of the door, looks down and says, “he- if you ever see him again, he’s never going to be able to apologise enough. Whatever happened to him, he survived so if he does love you and he does come back... don’t abandon him. He’s going to need you.”

Tommy doesn’t spare Karl another glance, doesn’t wait to see his expression. He walks out, back to the Eiffel Tower. He’s barely sat down when the same feeling spreads through him, rippling through him.

The people begin walking again, not looking like they’ve just been frozen in time.

Tommy stands, pulls his backpack over one shoulder and finally grabs the phone in his pocket. As he stumbles outside, his head hits the brick, breath stuck in his throat.

“If you keep doing this, Tommy,” Sapnap mumbles from his mind. “You’re going to get sick.”

“Shut the fuck up, snapmap,” Tommy grumbles. “Does it look like I give a shit if I get sick?”

“Well I care,” Sapnap hits back, “and you know George would kill me if anything happened to you.”

“I- I heard your name and that’s why-“ Tommy takes a shuddering breath. “You’re not real.”

There’s a hot hand gripping his. “Theseus, I may not be here in person but I’m here in spirit.”

Tommy calms at the pressure. “When I open my eyes, you’re going to be gone.”

“When you need us, we’ll be there,” Sapnap murmurs and when Tommy blinks his eyes open, no one is there.

Tommy looks to the phone gripped in his hand. He switches to the messaging app and selects one of the two contacts. He starts typing.

He can’t have his brothers but he can try and have a good relationship with someone else.

Wilbur’s eager response makes him smile.

As George would say: when the world is falling apart, he must be the one that keeps fighting, keeps surviving.

Tommy will have to leave soon. The Minecraft’s know about the Room and that will only bring trouble.

He might as well make some memories while he’s here.

Chapter End Notes

So as the revelations start to arrive, plot will also be arriving ;)

Thank you so much for your support! I love reading your comments (your theories are so good!!) so thank you! Take care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

More bonding :)

TW// weaponry, past child death, past abuse, past brainwashing, blood and injury, violence, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy sits with his knees drawn up to his chest, pocketknife in his hoodie pocket. It's quiet in this park, something peaceful in the air.

The trees sway in the breeze and Tommy has the desire to fly. He thinks he could finally breathe, up there, amongst the clouds, amongst the stars. His back aches at the thought.

There's an ache to his chest, one he can't explain. He thinks it's related to the Room.

He hated it there. It was wrong and terrible and horrible but it was a home, of sorts. A place where all his memories came from. They raised him, they cared for him.

He mostly misses his brothers. He misses Sapnap's warmth and George's eyebrow raises and Dream's laugh. They made it bearable. They made it liveable.

Footsteps sound, the hair on the back of his neck rises. Wilbur.

"You wanted to meet?" The man asks, sitting beside him on the bench. "Are you okay?"

Tommy looks to where he's picking at his fingers. "I wanted to apologise. I- I shouldn't have left like that, shouldn't have made you think it was your fault."

"Hey, Toms, I get it-"

Tommy shakes his head. "Shut the fuck up, I'm trying to be the bigger person here."

"You don't need to," Wilbur says with a smile, hair falling in his face, glasses on the bridge of his nose. "I get it. I overwhelmed you when I brought you to my family, I should've waited-"

"Man, can you actually shut up for a second?" Tommy snaps and drops his feet to the ground. "Stop being so self-sacrificial. I'm here to say you did nothing wrong. I want to get to know you, dickhead. I want to get to know Phil-"

Wilbur blinks at him. “What?”

“Not Technoblade, though. That guy is a bigger bitch than you.” Tommy continues, ignoring Wilbur. “I don’t mind coming ‘round your house. I just- sometimes I need space, yeah? I get overwhelmed easily.”

The thing is: Tommy does want connection. Tommy wants to feel like he has brothers again. He wants someone to care, someone to hold him, someone that is willing to kneel on the ground and die by his hands.

And the thing is: the Room beat the fear out of him. Their fears were weaponised against them. The boys who feared heights were made to run across rooftops, the boys who feared water were held under it.

Tommy is scared of that house. He is scared of his identity being known, he is scared of being seen as the killer he is.

So he must do what would be done to him in the Room. He needs to stamp it out.

“Oh,” Wilbur says, frowning at him. “Oh. So you’re not... angry at me?”

Tommy tilts his head. “I assumed you’d be angry at me.”

“No?” Wilbur stares at him. “I’m not going to be angry at you for being overwhelmed.”

“Oh, cool.” Tommy nods. “I’m not angry at you for being pushy. Sometimes I need pushy. It’s not like you tried to trap me in your house. Then I’d fucking stab you.”

“God, we’re idiots.”

Tommy laughs. It’s not fake, it feels warm. “Yeah, I suppose we are- you’re the bigger one, though.”

“Yeah, yeah. Shut up, gremlin child.” Wilbur leans over to squeeze Tommy’s shoulder. It’s an apology and a soothing gesture all in one. “So, what did you want to do today?”

“I don’t know, big dubs,” Tommy says, leaning back on the bench. “I didn’t think past this point.”

Wilbur hums. “I would recommend lasertag but I feel like I’d destroy you.”

Tommy raises his eyebrows. “Okay, so one: I have no idea what that is. Two: you’ve just jinxed yourself.”

Which is how Tommy finds himself getting a type of vest thrown over his head and a type of faux gun in his hands.

“So I just shoot you?” He asks, an odd panic rising. He knows this is a game, he knows this won’t actually hurt Wilbur but the room they’re standing in reminds him of the Room.

He remembers having a gun in his hand, remembers performing the same routine over and over again until all he knew was the movement. A room full of young boys, synchronised, looking deadly and dangerous.

He also remembers being in that Siberian snow, gun in hand, hunting his classmates.

Blood on his hands, staining deep into his soul.

“Yep!” Wilbur shows him how to hold it and he almost laughs at the irony. “It’s only us and it’s the one with the most hits that wins. Try your best. I’m only a pro because Techno takes this too seriously.”

The lights flash and one of the staff opens the door. With a less than gentle hand, Wilbur pushes Tommy out, into the dark room.

On first inspection, it looks like an obstacle course. Random walls, like a maze, with half structures and an upstairs.

“Two minutes, Toms!” Wilbur calls and Tommy sets out for a hiding place.

He has to remind himself that this isn’t real. This isn’t a test, this isn’t a mission. He’s not here to kill Wilbur, he’s here for fun.

And to bully Wilbur for buying out the place just for them. Seriously, Tommy knows crime pays well but the Minecraft’s seem to have an abundance of money.

On quick and silent feet, Tommy scouts out the area before hiding behind a half-wall. He drops down to a crouch and tries to stop the Huntsman taking over.

This is a game. Just a game.

He hears Wilbur before he sees him and readies his hand on the laser shooter. Wilbur may be loud on his feet - he’s quiet, but Tommy has been taught to be silent - but he clearly wasn’t lying about Technoblade taking this seriously enough for him to be confident.

He scans the area with quick glances, pausing to check behind structures, keeping his back to the wall.

It seems Morningstar knows how to handle a weapon and a rough terrain.

Tommy shifts onto his front, like George taught him, aims the shooter and fires before dropping his head so that Wilbur doesn’t catch sight of him. A noise sounds and Wilbur’s breath catches.

“Oh, Tommy!” He calls and for a second, Tommy is running from Dream, watching the rest of his classmates sprint and hide as they’re hunted. It was a test then, to see if they can survive against one of Dream infamous manhunts.

“Where are you, you little shit?” Wilbur shouts and Tommy snaps out of his memory.

This isn't Dream. This isn't a test. This is Wilbur. This is a game.

Tommy sits back into his crouch, tilts the shooter out behind the wall and fires. The same noise sounds, like a crackle of electricity - he isn't thinking about it, pushes any thoughts of the chair away - and Wilbur groans.

"What the fuck, man? Tommy, seriously, where are you?"

Tommy shoots again. That buzz of noise.

"Oh, it's on, raccoon boy."

Tommy muffles his laugh, waits for Wilbur to look behind himself before he rolls out from his half-wall. It's always better to not be cornered.

"Tommy!" Wilbur sings and Tommy moves around the wall, up on his feet and shoots before sprinting away.

"Over here, bitch!" He shouts back and god, his teachers would slap him for such stupidity at calling out his position but something warm is filling his chest.

He realises, as he hurtles up the stairs with Wilbur gaining on him laughing all the way, that he doesn't feel any fear, not even apprehension, not even dread. He doesn't feel hunted, doesn't feel like if he makes a mistake the world will crash down on his shoulders.

He feels light.

Slamming his back to a wall, he watches Wilbur rush past and shoots at his back before racing around the corner. If he uses some of his athleticism to curl around some obstacles, no one has to know.

He is a spider, after all.

Once he gains the upper hand, he calls out to Wilbur again, laughing as Wilbur chases after him. He shoots and shoots and shoots. Some lying down - George's form, remembering the pressing of his hands on his shoulders, shifting his hands - and some standing or crouching.

He jumps around the obstacles - Dream's method of training, of utilising the title of Huntsman Spider to crawl and climb and contort his body - and fires, laughing all the way.

Shouting insults - remembering Sapnap's fiery temper, the missions of bickering, of watching Dream groan at the words and George laugh - and hiding from Wilbur's answering fire.

It takes until the time is up and the lights start flashing for Tommy to realise he's having fun.

He's not panicking or worried. Sure, Wilbur didn't get a hit in because the Room will always be apart of him and some lessons are harder to break than others but he's happy.

He's actually happy.

He steps out and removes his vest and he can't shake the grin.

Wilbur comes over, sulking. "What the fuck? I bet you've--"

He takes in Tommy's look and his face does something complicated before his eyes immediately soften. He collects his glasses - given to the staff in fear of breaking them - and studies Tommy.

"Had fun?" He asks, voice a one-eighty of the aggressive tone before.

Tommy nods. "Can we do that again?"

Wilbur returns his grin. "Of course we can."

They get ice cream. Tommy doesn't stop smiling.

The mission he is given is supposed to be an easy one apart from the fact, they have little knowledge of the mark's powers.

Theseus enters the warehouse, gun in hand and freezes at the sound of the mark talking. Just not to him. To himself.

"What do you mean look behind-?" The mark spins around, pales at the sight of Theseus.

He looks like a street kid. Baggy clothes, mud on his face, greasy hair but the man rapidly steps back at the sight of him. Like he knows. Like he knows who Theseus is. Like he knows he's about to die.

He tilts his head and mutters under his breath, "I don't get why you're so worried, he's a kid-shut up."

"Uh," Theseus says, breaking every rule about interacting unnecessarily. "Why are you talking to yourself?"

The man frowns at him. "You're not here because of them?"

"Them?" Theseus asks, stepping closer.

"You know, my power? It was only a matter of time before the government would want my head." At Theseus' stare, he adds, "I'm a security risk. You know, because when I connect with people--"

He spins and tries to run. Theseus doesn't hesitate to slip the dagger from his sleeve and throw it. It hits the man's neck, he falls.

As Theseus approaches to confirm his kill, the man does something strange, he looks past Theseus and smiles at thin air, reaching for something that's not there.

Theseus grabs his dagger, the man's eyes roll up into his head. There is no pulse and Theseus leaves Latvia, more confused than when he arrived.

When he returns, the woman will smile as he recounts his kill. He will be given an extra bread roll at dinner.

He won't understand until he's not Theseus anymore.

He doesn't only reach out to Wilbur, he starts to reach back too.

"Back so soon?" Tubbo grins at him, bowing when Tommy enters his house, antennae flicking back and forth. "Knew you couldn't resist my charms."

"You invited me, dickhead," Tommy replies with an eye roll. "What's on the agenda?"

"Crime," Tubbo tells him with a grin and a flutter of his wings.

He flies away and Tommy blinks after him. "Uh, you don't actually mean that, do you?"

Tubbo keeps flying and Tommy has no choice but to follow after him. Tubbo hops up the stairs and Tommy is met with Ranboo's tired face as Tubbo pushes the door to his study open. It's filled with computer screens and Tommy pauses at the Russian on the screen.

"Please tell me you didn't invite me around to hack into a government?"

Tubbo pauses as Ranboo drops his gaze. "So," Tubbo giggles. "Funny story..."

"Oh my god," Tommy mutters. "Can't we do something more interesting like nukes?"

Somehow, Ranboo tucks himself smaller. Tubbo's wings start to flutter quite quickly. Tommy stares him down.

"Tubso," he says, slowly. "You don't have nuclear codes, do you?"

Tubbo looks away, antennae pushing back and down. "Uh, no?"

"In other news," Ranboo says with a cheery tone. "We're creating a cookie business!"

"A cookie business?" Tommy says, easily letting the topic slide and Ranboo nods, smiling at him.

"Let's focus more on the cookie business, okay? Everyone likes cookies--"

"But nukes!" Tubbo mutters.

"--and so we're going to compete against Las Nevadas," Ranboo finishes, ignoring Tubbo. "We've already got Fundy on our side."

“Purpled is willing to buy,” Tubbo replies, sitting in his chair, spinning around in a circle. “Punz would totally pretend he doesn’t want any and then seconds before closing, come in to steal one.”

Tommy settles against the wall. “I could take Quackity some when I try and ask for a job and slowly indoctrinate him into finding them the best cookies there are, only to hit him with the fact they’re from his opposing business.”

Both of the boys look at him. Ranboo looks surprised, Tubbo looks eager.

“Tommy,” Tubbo says, intensely. “We’re going to be best friends.”

They don’t end up hacking any government or investing in a cookie enterprise, even if Tubbo makes notes about how to do it efficiently. They do spend their time in the home cinema.

Being here a second time is a lot less daunting.

Tommy doesn’t feel the need to panic or run. He still sits with the exit in sight but he’s not as tense.

They watch Toy Story and it’s light and easy to digest. He doesn’t have to worry about getting triggered by any content - especially when Tubbo suggests the Hunger Games.

Freshly free from the Room, Tommy had tried to consume some of the media so that he could disguise himself better as a British teenager. He didn’t realise at the time what the Hunger Games was about.

Teenagers, sent to an area to die after being trained, with only one survivor.

He barely even got halfway before he had a panic attack.

“So,” Tubbo asks when the Toy Story credits start to roll. “Do you have any abilities?”

“Tubbo!” Ranboo hisses at him as Tommy leans back at the sudden question. “You can’t ask people that.”

“Why not?” Tubbo asks. “I mean, my abilities are pretty obvious.”

“You still don’t ask personal questions,” Ranboo says.

Tommy looks at them and says, “I, uh, I wasn’t born with any abilities.”

They both snap their heads around to stare at him. Tommy shrugs, wishes he had Henry in his hands to fiddle with and then shakes his head of the thought. He can’t grow attached to a stuffed animal. He won’t.

And anyway, it’s not really a lie. When he joined the Room, his blood work showed that nothing strange was going on. He didn’t have anything obvious happening.

Then, as Tommy started surviving despite not being the best, they started to look more closely at him. Every kill, every assessment, every trial.

He does have abilities. One is all about concentration and the other is one he never wants to ever use again.

“Oh,” Tubbo says. “I thought- I’m sorry.”

Tommy shrugs again. “It’s not a big deal.”

“Still,” Tubbo says, wings fluttering nervously, “I’m sorry.”

Tommy leans over, pushes him. “Shut up. It’s okay. What are yours, you mentioned stinging, right?”

Tubbo nods, looking relieved at the subject change. “I can fly and sting, yeah.” He flexes his wrists up and a long spine, almost like a sharp, thin bone extends out from his skin.

“Is it like an actual bee sting?” Tommy asks and Tubbo nods.

“I haven’t stung anyone but Phil tested it and said I can cause anaphylaxis. It’s a bee sting but at a higher concentration.”

Tommy considers the effect of something like that. On a knife, that would be a good venom, a good way to make someone pause in a fight.

He wonders if the Room poisoned him with it so that he would build up resistance like they did with other poisons. He remembers the nights vomiting, with a high fever, remembers fighting while his body protested.

“Cool,” he mutters. “What about you, boob boy?”

Ranboo looks up, startled. “Uh, I can teleport.”

“Techno also teaches him how to fight,” Tubbo mentions. “So he’s really good at fighting.”

Ranboo ducks his head, hand coming up to fiddle with his mask. “I’m not that good.”

“You are!”

Tommy looks to Tubbo. “Can you fight, too?”

“Yeah but I’d rather hack into a government facility than break down their doors.” Tubbo says with a smile. “Fighting is boring.”

Tommy reevaluates them in his head. They both have abilities, more defensive than offensive, but they can both fight. If Technoblade, the Blood God, is training them, they can obviously hold their own.

Which means, in a fight, he'd have to focus more on Tubbo and target Ranboo first. He'd have to injure him enough to make sure if he was able to teleport away, it wouldn't be long before he'd be dead-

"We can ask Techno if he wants to teach you," Tubbo says and Tommy snaps from his daze, rapidly shakes his head.

No more training. Not ever.

And not with the man Tommy was able to floor in minutes.

"I'm good." He says and clears his throat. "Not too fond of fighting."

Not really a lie. Tommy doesn't like hurting people, has never enjoyed killing. He tried to keep all of his missions as clinical as possible, limiting exposure and unnecessary emotions.

He did it for survival, not for pleasure.

Tubbo nods. "Yeah, it's so repetitive, right? Like why punch someone when I can find out all of their personal information and dox them."

"Tubbo," Ranboo sighs as Tommy grins. "We don't have time to unpack all of that."

"What? It's so much more easier for people to be scared of you when you know where they live."

"You're a menace to society."

"You're still going to marry me, though," Tubbo grins, wings fluttering as Ranboo sighs, loudly, nodding.

"Yeah. Unfortunately, I am."

Tommy leans back and says, "you're probably the weirdest people I know."

"Thank you," they say in unison and Tommy shivers.

"What the fuck?"

Ranboo laughs as Tubbo jumps up to grab the remote, hunting for Toy Story 2.

Tommy let's himself relax in their home. It's easy to not worry here, to let his guard down. There are no expectations, no rules.

Tommy can be Tommy: careless and free. He doesn't have to be Theseus: cold and calculating. He can be a child.

Tommy will never escape his past and soon enough, he will have to run from it again. He's staying in L'Manberg too long and he worries the silence from Russia is too telling.

If his Handlers are still alive, Tommy cannot fight them alone and he'd rather be a coward and run than be shot in the street like a dog.

But as he watches Tubbo and Ranboo laugh, he doesn't know if walking away from this will be easy. He doesn't think he can grab his bags and run without saying goodbye to the people that have showed him life can be better.

It's reminds him of that moment back in Russia as stood by the car. All he could think about was the fact his brothers were sleeping inside, unknowing of his plans. He had hesitated there, in the snow, for the first time since Eret placed a gun in his hands and asked if he had what it took to be a Huntsman.

He had watched the Room explode into red as he drove away, then.

Is this how this will end, in blood and flames and Tommy running?

He swallows, smiles at the boys and tries to shake that thought from his head.

He'll deal with it when it comes.

Chapter End Notes

They're bonding lads ;)

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions! Y'all better be taking care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

A couple of hints, a reveal, but maybe not the one you're expecting ;)

Also!! The reason the chapter amount as changed was because I originally wrote an outline for twenty chapters and then as I've fleshed out the characters more, the chapters have increased. So right now, I've got around thirty chapters outlined but that could increase <3

TW// past abuse, blood and injury, weaponry, mention of child death, mention of child trafficking, mention of past brainwashing, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy has made an error. A very big error. Possibly a damning one.

Maybe he wants to see Trigger again: he is his favourite Hero. Maybe he takes the incentive to drift close to the Heroes Committee skyscraper, hoping to catch a glimpse or maybe speak to the Captain to apologise.

He should've paid more attention when Phil said that Morningstar likes to be around the Heroes skyscraper because of Vulpes.

"Oh, hello there," Morningstar croons at him and Tommy's hand tightens on the gun.

It's his first night out patrolling after taking a break. He shouldn't be stumbling upon Morningstar. He just heard about a man abusing his power as scout leader. Tommy found the man and his very interesting browser history and put a bullet through his skull.

Yet here is he, in an alley, facing off with Morningstar. The Villain that can compel people to tell him their deepest desires and secrets. The Villain, that doesn't know he's standing opposite Tommy, someone he's said he sees as a little brother.

"Hello," Tommy replies in his Russian accent. He builds every barrier in his mind as high as it can go, reinforcing it. He will not tell Wilbur anything.

Morningstar's outfit is something out of a Shakespeare play. It's got the same regal air of the Blood God's with the shirt, the trousers and the masquerade coat. Covering his face is a jester mask, black and white porcelain. His eyes can be seen through the mask but they're not the warm brown of Wilbur. There's something dark in them that's all Morningstar.

He waves his hands and says, “it’s so good to finally meet you, Theseus. I’m Morningstar.”

Tommy nods, wills himself to remain calm. “Good to know. As interesting as this conversation would be-“

“Oh, no, no, no,” Wilbur drawls, tutting. “Let’s chat. I have so many questions.”

“The Angel and I have an agreement,” Tommy says, firmly. “I get to leave when I want.”

“But the Angel isn’t here, is he?” Wilbur asks and Tommy can hear the grin in his voice.

Tommy has the gun pointed at his face before he can blink. “Then I guess I’m shooting you.”

Wilbur laughs and it’s a vicious sound. He claps and says in an odd tone, like honey, “I don’t think you will, Huntsman.”

For a second, all Tommy can see and hear is Eret. Eret and that cruel smile. Eret and the clapping. Eret and the cooing.

Wilbur knows he’s a Huntsman. Those papers Technoblade was giving Quackity proves that. They know about the Red Room, so what else do they know?

Do they know about what Tommy had to live through? Do they know how many people he’s killed?

“Snap out of it,” George hisses in his mind and Tommy is no longer standing in the Room, Eret’s face before him. He’s in a dark alley opposite Morningstar. “Don’t let him get the upper hand.”

Tommy’s hand tightens on the gun, finger hovering over the trigger. He tilts his head. “No, I think I will.”

Wilbur mirrors his head tilt and says in that honeyed voice, “jump up and down.”

Tommy blinks at him and then rolls his eyes. “Look, I don’t know what you’re trying to do but I really just want to leave-“

“Oh,” Wilbur interrupts him. “The Captain was right, our powers don’t affect you, do they?”

Tommy doesn’t outwardly react, he simply says, “you can’t force me to be here so now am I free to go?”

“I still want to talk,” Wilbur says, spreading his arms like an invitation, “and ask questions. You didn’t react when I called you a Huntsman yet your name is on their files.”

“I’m not telling you anything, Morningstar,” Tommy replies, in a clipped tone.

“Yet you’re not shooting me, are you?” Wilbur drops his voice. “Why is that? You threaten us and yes, I’m not going to be as stupid as the Blood God and assume you won’t follow

through but you act like you don't want to kill us. We're Villains, surely we deserve your bullets like the rest of the criminals here?"

Tommy looks at him and lowers the gun. "And I thought you were the smart one."

Wilbur rocks back, eyes wide. "Oh?"

Tommy pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs. "You hurt people, yes. You kill them, okay. Haven't you seen the trend in the people I hunt?"

"Those who harm children," Wilbur says and Tommy cocks his head.

"Those who harm the vulnerable," he corrects. "I hunt those who harm people that can't protect themselves. Little boys turned into drug dealers. Beaten wives. Children who can't run when the monster under the bed is their friend or parent or teacher."

Tommy points at Wilbur. "You hurt and kill other criminals. There are no records of you or the Syndicate being involved in trafficking or anything involving hurting children. So long as that remains, I have no reason to come after you."

Wilbur hums, studying him. Tommy doesn't twitch under the scrutiny.

Wilbur isn't wrong. There is a reason Tommy doesn't kill them. He knows what happens when he pulls the trigger and he's just thankful a lot of the people he's killed didn't have anything strange in their bloodstream.

So long as he ignores it, it runs out anyway.

But there's also the reason Tommy stays and talks to them. He's intrigued by them, curious. He wants to know more about their Villain counterparts, just like how he wants to get to know them as people.

Connection, he thinks.

"That's what the Red Room did, didn't it?" Wilbur asks, suddenly and Tommy wills himself not to freeze. "They took children and turned them into Huntsman Spiders, into Black Widows."

When Tommy doesn't speak, his voice not working, Wilbur adds, "they turned children into killers."

Tommy is back there, waking up with his hand cuffed to the bed frame, surrounded by twenty-seven boys. He is there when they slowly get whittled down.

One dead from training. One lost to the wilderness. One failing an assessment. One making a mistake during ballet.

He's back there, waking up with his hand cuffed to the bed frame, surrounded by twenty boys. Then fifteen. Then ten. Then five.

Then alone.

Twenty-eight to one.

“That’s who you’re running from,” Wilbur continues in Tommy’s silence. “You tried to destroy them but you don’t know if they’re still active.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying,” Tommy replies, Russian accent strained.

“Oh, but I think I do.” Wilbur pitches his voice higher. “Is your clock ticking down, Huntsman?”

Something in Tommy snaps, so violently he can almost hear it.

Dream is there, at his shoulder, scar across his face. George has a rifle resting against his shoulder, covered in his black suit. Sapnap is playing with his lighter, bandana holding his hair back from his face.

“When they come for me,” he says, lowly, dangerously, everything the Room made him into, every bit the Huntsman he is, “what’s stopping them from going after you, too? Only the strongest of us survive the program, only the most powerful graduate. None of your abilities work on me and I took down the Blood God without breaking a sweat.”

Tommy steps closer, nearly laughing when Wilbur takes one back. Their roles have reversed. Wilbur may be a snake but Tommy is a spider, one that’s tricked the snake into his web.

“What will you do when an army comes? I’m not killing you because I don’t want to be the killer they made me into but that won’t stop them. Not if you’re in their way.” Tommy grins, knowing Wilbur can’t see it. “You better pray that I did destroy them if not, L’Manberg will be nothing but ash.”

When Tommy settles back on his heels, his brothers are no longer flanking him.

“The Captain is a reality warper,” Wilbur replies, confidence stripped from his voice. “The Angel controls death.”

“And yet they do not affect me,” Tommy replies. “Who’s to say they don’t have a reality warper? You’re not the only one good with your words, Morningstar.”

“No,” Wilbur agrees, “but I have learnt a lot. The Angel was right, you are chatty, aren’t you?”

Tommy stares at him, at the way he speaks like he’s caught Tommy out. All he’s admitted is that the Room takes children and turns them into him: a cold-blooded killer. He’s admitted he may be hunted and that Wilbur and his family may be caught in the crossfire yet Wilbur seems impressed with himself.

“You know,” Tommy says, calmly. “One of the biggest lessons they taught us was about not being cocky.”

“Oh?” Wilbur says and Tommy lifts his arm and shoots.

Wilbur stumbles back, surprise in his eyes as he crumbles to the ground, blood staining his white shirt. Tommy approaches him, dropping down to a crouch next to Wilbur’s elbow. He moves the gun to his left hand and presses it against the mask on Wilbur’s face, between his eyes, that are now wide with panic.

“I could kill you,” Tommy says, bluntly. “I could but I’m not going to because I’m trying to understand this place. I’m trying to understand you. I don’t want to be the killer they made me into. I want to be better. But this is a warning, Morningstar. You’re smart, you should understand now there’s a bullet in your shoulder.”

Tommy stands, places the gun back in his holster.

“What if I bleed out in this alley?” Wilbur calls to Tommy’s retreating figure and he briefly pauses.

“I have a feeling the Angel won’t let that happen.”

It’s a theory Tommy has, one based on the pictures in Wilbur’s house. Phil is unchanging in every photo but in the ones with Ranboo and Tubbo, both Technoblade and Wilbur also look the same as they did in the earlier ones.

If Phil can control death, maybe he’s stopping it coming for his sons.

At Wilbur’s shocked silence, Tommy has all the answers he needs.

With one last glance at that jester’s mask, Tommy disappears into the darkness.

Theseus meets his first Black Widow during a training exercise.

The ground is frozen but no snow has fallen. The obstacle course stands in its glory outside the facility and Theseus eyes it with trepidation. He is still young, not as strong as the others, and he knows mistakes are not taken lightly.

Beside him, a girl stands, long brown hair tied into a ponytail and vines crawling up her arms.

“Theseus,” the teacher calls. “Hannah. Begin.”

They take off sprinting. The ground is slippery and pairing that with the chill, it’s difficult to stay upright, let alone hang onto the structures.

It’s over wooden planks and climbing up rope. It’s crawling through mud and over the A-frame. It’s up the wall and under the barbed wire. It’s approaching the lake, ice layer freshly broken and swimming through it.

The last part of the course is a single rope, leading to a bell.

Theseus is quicker, the first to make it to the rope but he's barely starting to climb when there's a hand gripping his ankle, tugging him down. He falls, briefly winded before jumping up.

Hannah stares at him, eyes burning. "I will not fail," she says to him as they circle one another.

"But I will not die." Theseus replies, lunging for her.

They are trained to see failure as worse than death. Theseus doesn't agree: so long as he survives, he doesn't care.

He may be faster but from the way she has his neck gripped by her thighs, flipping him until he's groaning on the ground, she's the better fighter. She spares him a look before jumping for the rope, beginning to climb.

He shakes himself. Theseus is a survivor. He will not die here.

He waits until she's three quarters of the way up the rope before he begins to climb after her.

She spots him and in her panic, loses her grip. He wraps the rope around his foot, grabs her ankle like she did and tugs. She tries to latch on but Theseus digs his nails in until he can feel warm blood spill down his fingers.

She falls and he climbs.

The bell is rung.

Theseus learns to not underestimate a Widow.

In his apartment, in the light of the rising sun, Tommy holds Henry close to his chest, soft music playing from his record player.

He wouldn't say it out loud but Henry has improved his sleep schedule. It's almost as if he's scaring off Tommy's dreams. Or maybe it's just the pure comfort he brings.

Henry doesn't judge him. Henry just listens. Henry is soft and warm and Tommy spends every night curled up with one hand on his gun, the other holding onto Henry.

He tried calling Wilbur yesterday, the morning after the fight. He said he wanted to meet but Wilbur was quick to explain that he wasn't feeling too well.

At least he got home alright. Tommy hopes he, along with Technoblade, learn that he's not someone to be messed with.

Tommy doesn't like hurting people but he will. If it comes down to his survival, he will do whatever it takes to survive.

So no more Wilbur for at least until he can heal up.

Tommy could bother Tubbo and Ranboo. Ever since they discovered he hadn't watched many movies, they've compiled the supposed best ones.

Tubbo seems to find Tommy breaking apart the murderers plan in horror movies hilarious. It's not Tommy's fault he was trained for this and it's also not his fault that some of these killers are so stupid. Half of them are terrible at being subtle.

He could bother Quackity. Finding a job could pass the time.

The only problem is that ever since Quackity was informed about Sapnap, he seems to have disappeared. Coincidentally Chronos hasn't been spotted in public for a couple of days.

Tommy doesn't want to see Quackity like that, not when he might end up spilling everything about Sapnap. Not when he wants to explain that Sapnap is a good man and a funny one and that he fought the hardest to be human, fought to be more than the Huntsman he was.

Tommy holds Henry tighter, takes a deep breath.

So no Wilbur and no Tubbo or Ranboo and no Quackity.

Which leaves his favourite place to go to.

Once the sun has fully risen and Tommy has eaten a sufficient amount, he leaves his apartment and arrives at Niki's Bakery. He opens the door, the bell chiming his entrance and she looks up with a smile.

"Oh, Tommy," she greets. "I was actually about to close."

"Oh, sorry," Tommy says and she shakes her head.

"No, it's okay. Are you here for food or would you like to join me?"

His curiosity is peaked. "Where to?"

She grins, something a little sharp there. "You'll see. Tubbo mentioned you're trying to find a hobby."

With a bag thrown over her shoulder, she leaves the bakery, Tommy trailing behind. Once out, she pushes the plant pots closer to the glass and locks the door.

Then she begins to walk.

"If you're going to murder me," Tommy says as he follows the unfamiliar route. "I would've let you do it inside."

She laughs. "No murder today, hopefully."

“Hopefully,” Tommy parrots, looking at her. “Niki, are you a secret badass? I knew you were cool.”

She rolls her eyes, pulling her pink hair into a tiny ponytail. “Of course I’m a badass,” she says and it takes Tommy a second to realise she’s speaking German.

“If you’re testing me,” he replies in German, “it’s not going to work. Did Tubbo mention I knew Dutch?”

“Yes,” she replies in Dutch. “But that was German.”

“I’m aware,” he says in Dutch, easily switching. “He really can’t keep secrets.”

“He never had to,” she says, this time in English. “He didn’t grow up having to.”

Something about that makes him frown, studying her. There’s something different about her, something sharper. It puts him on edge, the hair at the back of his neck rising.

He has a switchblade in his pocket, two throwing stars in his boots. He can fight if need be but as he studies Niki’s perfect posture, the way she’s done her makeup - black eyeliner in a wing, pink blush and lips - and the way her eyes flit around her surroundings, he feels like he’s missing something.

This entire situation is familiar but he doesn’t know why.

“Stop looking at me like that,” she says with a disarming smile. “You can leave at anytime, Tommy.”

“You’re kind of freaking me out,” he says and she pauses, reaches for his hand and squeezes.

“You don’t have to come. I just- well, I guess I’m being selfish.”

He blinks at her. “Selfish?”

She nods and mumbles, “I don’t want to be alone in this but I understand if you don’t want to come.”

He doesn’t trust her, just like he doesn’t trust the rest of them. Not when it comes to his life.

But Tommy likes her. Tommy finds Niki soothing, a cold press onto a burn. She listens and is calm with him, accepting and non-judgemental.

“Will you explain when we’re there?” He asks and she nods.

“Of course.”

He swallows and nods, squeezing back. “Then let’s go.”

She smiles at him, small but proud, and tugs him with her, hand in hand. It makes him calm, longing for any type of affection.

He worries for when he gets more comfortable around these people. He's going to turn into a koala and he can't damage his image of being the less clingy one when compared to Tubbo.

Niki leads him down some streets, through an alley and then to a wooden door. She pushes it open, dropping his hand, and steps in.

The smell hits Tommy first, that familiar scent of sweat, window cleaner and wooden floors.

Then he hears the music and stills.

Swan Lake pours from the speakers, the same notes he spent hours en pointe to. He remembers hearing it so often he could dance deaf and still hit the moves in perfect timing.

He remembers hearing it in the chair, electricity burning through him, leaving him twitching and vulnerable.

The family he had: the woman with the black hair, his older brother Dream. The mowed lawn at their house.

He can't breathe as the music flows through him. The dramatic rises and falls. The pirouettes, the arabesques, the fouettés.

"Fuck," he breathes.

Niki sits in the centre of the room, lacing up her pointe shoes. He realises she's been watching him and is quick to relax his shoulders and take a deep breath.

"Not a fan of ballet?" She asks and he swallows.

"Not really, no."

She nods, turns back to her shoes. Rising, she begins to gently warm up, the movements so familiar it makes something in Tommy ache.

"Neither was I," she says. "I hated it but it was something I could never forget. So I embraced it instead."

"Yeah?" He whispers and she smiles at him in the wall-length mirror, stretching against the barre.

"I control me," she says, voice firm, fire in her eyes. "If I want to dance to Swan Lake, I get to do it."

"That's a good thought process," he says, voice strained, barely acknowledging what he's saying.

She hums, still watching him. "Do you know ballet?"

He clears his throat, so baffled by this turn of events. He did not plan to be discussing ballet with Niki.

Even if he cannot part with his pointe shoes, stuffed under his bed in his apartment. Even if he still warms up as if to dance but never does. Even if he could dance this dance deaf, blind or dying.

“Yes,” he says.

Her smile widens. “Then you’re free to join me at anytime.”

The music changes and she enters first position, waiting.

For the duration of the song, Tommy simply watches from the doorway as Niki dances like she was born to do it. Every move is flawless, perfectly timed and perfectly presented.

It’s a glorious piece and he’s in awe of her skill.

He’s only ever seen people dance that perfectly because of the Room’s training.

“Where did you learn?” He asks when the music changes again.

Now that he’s tuning his memories out, he can vaguely hear lessons going on down the hall. A ballet master commanding his students. The familiarity is not lost on Tommy.

“Bolshoi.” She replies, lifting her leg high, movements well practiced.

He blinks, thrown. “I thought you were German.”

She shrugs. “I can be whoever I want to be.”

Something twists in Tommy, the facts slowly lining up in his head.

Her meticulous work surfaces, her accents and languages, the way she holds herself, her flawless ability to dance.

He swallows, dropping his hand to his switchblade. “Let me guess,” he says, slowly as she watches him in the mirror, “you were one of twenty-eight?”

She pauses and turns around, looks at him, German accent dropping to Russian as she says, “I am one of twenty-eight young ballerinas with the Bolshoi.”

Tommy tightens his hand on his knife. “No,” he says, remembering the words they drilled into their heads while in the chair. “That’s not right.”

She smiles, something dangerous in her eyes as she says in Russian, “I am one of twenty-eight Black Widow agents with the Red Room.”

“Niki,” he says, panic clawing at his throat. “I don’t-“

“And you are one of twenty-eight Huntsman Spider agents with the Red Room,” she says, slowly, “aren’t you, Theseus?”

Chapter End Notes

So.... Niki, huh? :)

I would also like to say again: your comments are amazing, I love reading your theories, especially when you get close to the plot

Thank you so much for your support, I'm so glad you're enjoying it! Take care of yourselves!

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

We're back and we're saying hi to a character you've been asking for ;)

Also, if you want to rant to me and others on discord, here's the link:
<https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

My Discord

TW// child death, injury, violence committed by children on children, past abuse, past brainwashing, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Puffy looks at Wilbur, laying across the couch in a pathetic sprawl and meets Phil's eyes. "So I see Theseus is getting a little trigger-happy?"

"Wil was winding him up," Phil says with an eye roll. "He's just lucky the guy doesn't seem as inclined to murder as he likes to tell us."

"And that we have Ponk on stand by," Techno mumbles by Wilbur's head as he sits on the floor. Wilbur grumbles something into the pillow, pushing at Techno's head with a weak shove.

"You know," Ponk shouts from the sink in the kitchen. "When I took this job, I never thought I'd be picking so many bullets out from all of you."

"I never thought you would either," Phil replies, staring at his sons. "I told you both to be careful. I thought I told you he was dangerous."

"Piss off," Wilbur groans, pulling the blanket up to his chin. "Stop bullying me when I got fucking shot."

"Which is your fault for antagonising a literal assassin," Techno drawls. "You didn't see me complaining when he shot me, too."

Wilbur lifts his head, eyes narrowed dangerously. "You fucking heal, dick. I don't."

“That’s the thing that interests me,” Puffy says, tilting her head to look at his sons. “Our powers are useless against him but he doesn’t stop them from working. Techno could still heal himself after being shot but couldn’t make Theseus fear him.”

Wilbur looks at her. “So you’re saying that I would still be able to compel an entire room of people but he’d be able to fight it?”

“Yes,” she says, head tilting as she thinks. “I was able to make the paralytic wear off quicker than he said but I couldn’t affect him. I could see the probabilities but they were- they were glitched. I couldn’t change any of his probabilities.”

Wilbur hums, leaning back into the couch as Techno looks at Phil. “Have you tried with-“

“If it goes wrong, I kill him.” Phil answers. “My powers aren’t something I can play around with, mate.”

“We could try Bad,” Wilbur suggests. “Or Skeppy, he might be better because he’s less of a threat.”

Bad, or better known as the Demon of L’Manberg, is a low-level Hero simply because he switched sides. An expert fighter and tracker, along with his abilities of darkness manipulation, he used to be one of Phil’s best workers.

Then he met Skeppy, a man that could break anyone into a high-security prison and out of one and decided to switch sides.

While they may both be considered Heroes, there are still reports that Bad isn’t as lenient with criminals as other Heroes are.

Puffy looks to her lap. “I’m trying to keep the Heroes far away from him. Especially if he shoots them, the Committee will be after his head.”

They all listen to her words, knowing that Theseus could very well be hunted by the Heroes if he’s not careful. He’s powerful and dangerous but if anything happens to the Heroes, he could have the entire American government wanting his head.

Ponk swings his head around the door, white hair falling into his eyes. “So is this guy actually a Huntsman Spider?”

Phil raises his eyebrows at his doctor. “Have you been listening the entire time?”

The man grins at him. “Phil, people like talking about this guy. At my clinic, they won’t shut up about him. You can’t be annoyed that I want to know more when he’s shooting you and your kids.”

“And getting away with it,” Techno murmurs.

Phil rolls his eyes. “You say they like you haven’t tried to pick a fight with him and lost, mate.”

“Heh? How was I supposed to know he was trained, Phil? How was I supposed to know he was a Russian assassin?”

“So he is a Russian assassin?” Ponk eagerly leans forward, eyes alight with curiosity.

They all look to Wilbur and he huffs. “They find children and turn them into killers, that much is obvious. He also doesn’t know if he did destroy the Red Room, that’s why he talks about running. He says that if they’re still active, an army will come and they’ll be like him: deadly.”

“Children?” Puffy breathes, eyes wide. “They take children and- and they turn them- turn them into killers?”

Wilbur nods, mouth twisted into a vicious frown. “He said the only reason he didn’t kill me was because he doesn’t want to be the killer they made him into.”

Puffy ducks her head and Ponk’s face scrunches up into disgust. “Poor guy.”

Phil flexes his wing to curl around Puffy’s back, offering her comfort as he studies Techno’s face. His son is twirling a strand of hair around his finger, crimson eyes distant.

“Tech,” he calls, gaining his attention. “What is it?”

“Nothin’,” he mutters, shakes his head. Wilbur nudges him, pulling his ear until Techno turns to bat his hand away. “Stop.”

“Tell us,” Wilbur says, voice honeyed and Techno’s speaking without his consent.

“Well, we’re thinking this guy is, what, late twenties because of skill level? But what if he’s a lot younger. I mean, the only file Tubbo could find was of seven months ago and the guy has all the traits of a teenager: immature, impulsive, defensive.”

“He did mention something about only the most powerful surviving to graduation,” Wilbur speaks, voice dropping, crying out when Techno hits him for compelling him. “Fuck, Tech!”

“Don’t compel me.”

“I’ll do what I want,” Wilbur says with a grin before looking back at Phil. “What if that file is of his graduation?”

“What does an assassin graduation even look like?” Ponk mutters. “Do they have to like, kill a politician or something?”

Phil thinks back to their conversations. Theseus, so quick to assume, so quick to run at the slightest hint of danger. The way he sat on that roof, like he wouldn’t mind jumping.

He remembers the way he was so confused by everyone being nice to him, that they wanted to talk to him rather than shoot him. Sam had said the same thing, like all he’s ever known was death.

“So he’s twenty-one?” Wilbur says. “That’s the age of graduation in the UK.”

“In the US, it can be eighteen. Graduating high school,” Techno adds.

“What about Russian graduations?” Phil says and all of them shrug.

“Anything from sixteen to twenty-one?” Wilbur suggests and then sighs. “Fuck, please tell me we haven’t been fighting a kid.”

“A kid that has been trained to kill,” Techno adds.

“A kid that’s possibly being hunted by the people that trained him,” Puffy reminds them. “How long until they find him? I’m sorry but I can’t live with myself knowing I let a possible child be taken by an organisation that trained him to kill.”

“Neither can I,” Phil says and then points at Wilbur. “You’re not allowed anywhere near him.”

“Dad!” Wilbur immediately tries to protest. “I didn’t mean-“

“No. End of discussion.”

Phil then looks to Techno, who rapidly shakes his head and holds his hands up. “I can’t speak to people, let alone traumatised child assassins.”

Phil muffles a snort at the comment as Puffy runs a hand across her face. “I think he likes Sam. Plus, he has training on how to talk someone down.”

Ponk grins. “He’s got such a nice voice, hasn’t he?”

Techno groans and Wilbur rolls his eyes. “Seriously?” He asks and Ponk’s grin pulls into a smirk.

“I’ve snapped up two of the hottest eligible bachelors, who just so happen to be Heroes-“

“And one of which is my son,” Puffy huffs and then looks up at him. “Remember there’s a family dinner on-“

“Sunday,” Ponk replies. “I’ve already got my suit, don’t worry.”

Wilbur and Techno share a look. “Dad,” Wilbur whines, “why don’t we have family dinners?”

Phil frowns at him. “We eat together every night, Wil.”

“Cringe,” Techno says. “We never wear suits.”

Phil rolls his eyes, turns to Puffy and sighs at her little smirk. “What about the other heroes?”

“Fundy would probably annoy him,” Wilbur says for her.

“I’d suggest Karl but he can’t fight and if his power doesn’t work, he’d be at a big disadvantage,” Puffy begins. “He’s also having time off after finding out about Nick. Bad would be good, I suppose. As much as I don’t want to put my children in danger, both Drista and Foolish might get along with him.”

“Drista could talk herself out of a possible shooting,” Techno agrees.

Puffy laughs. “Yes, she could.”

“So that’s the plan,” Phil says with a clap of his hands. “We try to get him to talk to us and we do everything to get him to see that we want to help him.”

Theseus has heard that even once graduated, there is a test that is the final one. It is a test performed by the woman with the black hair and those that fail, die.

Dream, George and Sapnap do not comment on it. They simply look to him and say, “you will survive.”

He doesn’t know what they mean until he is standing in what looks to be a drawing room at the far end of the facility. It’s a pretty room with bookshelves and soft chairs and a ceiling painted to be a galaxy, hundreds of stars blinking down at him.

The woman smiles at him. “Theseus,” she greets. “All of the spiders are my children. I give life to you and only the strongest of you survive.”

He doesn’t understand.

She lifts her hands, nails painted black, to the sides of his skull. “This is my gift to you.”

She presses her lips to his forehead and Theseus still doesn’t understand.

Not until he closes his eyes and the galaxy bursts behind his eyelids. Darkness ebbs and flows, black becomes purple becomes dark reds and vibrant oranges.

His legs give out as his heart thunders in his chest. He feels like he’s choking, like he can’t breathe, like the very oxygen in his lungs has been ripped out. Everything closes in on him as he shudders and shakes, feeling like his body is being pulled apart and placed back together again.

Over and over and over again.

The only thing that tethers him to reality is the hand in his hair, the soft coos leaving the woman’s lips as she sits beside his crumpled form.

“I’m going to tell you a story, Theseus,” she whispers as he can’t summon the energy to scream, “about two sisters who loved each other so much they became known as the start and the end. Life and death. Creation and destruction.”

She sighs, reminiscent as Theseus is barely able to breathe.

“But one sister fell in love with a mortal. She loved him so much, she tore the fabric of the universe apart to make sure he would live as long as they loved one another.”

The hand in his hair grips tighter, tears pour down Theseus’ face. “The other sister couldn’t believe she was being abandoned for such a boring thing, one she created. So she settled on good, old-fashioned revenge. She was creation, after all. In a fit of anger and desperation, she bestowed upon the mortals their own version of creation, birthing magic in their veins. In your veins, Theseus.”

He curls up into a ball, agony being an understatement. He both feels everything and nothing at all. It’s like he’s suspended in limbo, in fire and in ice.

He feels like he’s dying and being born all at once.

“Her sister wasn’t pleased and so cast her sister out, vowing to never love her again, stealing her titles from her.” The woman leans down, whispers right into Theseus’ ear, “but she didn’t steal her power. That’s what your purpose is, Theseus. That’s what the Red Room is for. An army to battle Death herself. An army that is built purely on the strongest of you, now given eternal life.”

Theseus whines, low in his throat, like a rabbit caught in a trap. He wills himself to pass out but his body is refusing.

For the first time in his life, he longs for death, regretting his desire to survive.

“I haven’t introduced myself, have I? How silly of me,” the woman says. “I’m Clara. I created the universe and you, along with my other spiders, will destroy it.”

The snow falls quickly, in thick rushes. From here, he can see the barbed wire, the guard towers. It’s not the open plain he’s used to, the endless view of white.

He remembers the original Room in Belarus, even though he’s pretty sure the memories aren’t real. It was built more as an orphanage slash ballet studio, with high ceilings and marble arches. The Black Widows slept in the room across the hall.

The Room he grew up in was built similarly to the one in Belarus, but further out into the snow. Underneath the wooden floors of the training studios, the base sat. Rooms filled with tables and chairs, filled with projectors, filled with beds and handcuffs attached to the bed frames, filled with the chair.

It was beautiful on the first and second floors. Something refined, something grand. All golds and reds, honouring the culture of their country.

Underneath, it was as cold as the snow outside, something dark and sinister that reflected the program they were apart of.

He always saw it as the memories they gave him. The ones at the top represented the dancer he is. The ones hidden beneath the carefully constructed lies represented the Huntsman Spider he also is.

This, though, this version of the Room is his least favourite so far. Concrete and steel doors, all cold, all terrifying. Nothing of the brief moments of comfort he grew to enjoy.

It's why, watching the boys fight in the snow, he feels nothing but anger. It bubbles inside of him, something vicious and deadly.

He could excuse the treatment before: he had no choice but to agree. He assumes something had happened on a certain mission because he has been unmade so many times. He knew better than to disagree or run from the Room.

Yet because of Theseus, they've been shipped to this horrid building with a twitchy Eret, who's less calculating and more deranged; and the woman, who used to provide some calming effect, has disappeared. He knows she isn't dead or else there would be hell to pay and their punishment for not stopping Theseus would've been far more severe.

"Dream," George snaps and he straightens. "Calm down."

"Easy for you to say," he replies, watching the boys throw each other to the frozen dirt in nothing but flimsy t-shirts and shorts. "I can't exactly hide my distaste for this shitty place."

"But you need to," George warns. "Eret may not be able to see it but anyone here can use that against you."

One of the boys collapses. They both look over. His partner stares at him, nudging him with his boot. The boy on the ground doesn't so much as twitch. His partner looks up as the field falls silent. George nods in Dream's stead, the boy snaps the other's neck.

"Good," George congratulates, even as Dream knows they're both feeling sick from the sight. They have to be careful here, they can sense the eyes watching from outside sources. "Go inside and warm up. I didn't tell the rest of you to stop."

The fighting continues, the boy disappears inside. Dream clenches his fists.

"How's Sap doing?"

George crosses his arms over his chest, staring out at the snow. "Did he tell you that the mission he had in L'Manberg involved his possible wedding?"

Dream snorts. "Sounds like him. Is that why he's sulking?"

George nods. "From the sounds of it, Theseus' friends have hacked into the files, found out about the whole mission," he says it quietly, under his breath, face as impassive as ever as Dream tries to school his own expression of surprise. "I had to talk Sap down from doing something reckless."

"Fuck," Dream hisses. "You're not blacking out anymore then?"

George shakes his head. “No. Plus he didn’t even realise that Sap had showed up to listen when he panicked. I think we can start reaching back which means he’s getting stronger.”

“He’s getting more stressed,” Dream snaps. “I mean, he still thinks we’re hallucinations.”

“Well, we are, aren’t we?” George replies, calmly. “He’s never used this before, of course he’s going to think he’s going insane.”

Dream slowly turns his head and narrows his eyes. “I’d like to remind you that the first time he summoned me or whatever the fuck he’s doing, I found him on the floor with a loaded gun in his hand. He kept trying to shoot himself in the head.”

George barely blinks. “And I’d like to remind you that if we don’t keep it together, he’s screwed.” George briefly meets his eyes before looking back out to the snow. “Be glad he’s even able to do it so that we can note his condition.”

Dream sighs, looks to the boys in the snow. They fall and rise, over and over. He’s impressed in a detached way.

“If he uses it, he doesn’t lose it. That’s all that matters.” He flexes out his fingers. “Even if that means watching him crumble.”

“He’ll survive,” George says, confidently. “He’s stronger than us and when we’re inevitably sent after him, we’ll look after him.”

“And what of his new friends?” Dream asks.

Another boy falls. For a tense second, he doesn’t rise. Then, on shaky legs, he rises, falls into position.

“We’ll deal with them when the time comes,” George says, shaking his head to rid his dark hair of the snowflakes. “I’ll take over. Go and find Sapnap to spar with before a guard mentions his suspicious behaviour to Eret.”

Dream nods, goes to leave and then asks, in a quiet tone, “what if we’re sent to kill him?”

George actually looks at him, fire burning in those dark eyes. “Then we do everything in our power to save him.”

Chapter End Notes

Ik you’re all ranting about Tommy’s powers but have you considered... the suspense of it all? :)

But Tommy’s purpose has been revealed and so has the woman, thoughts?
Like I said, you can talk to me or others on my discord:

<https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

Thank you so much for your support, your comments, kudos and interactions!! Take care of yourselves... that's a threat ;)

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Yo, yo, yo - I am tired and this is early because I have work to do :(

[My Discord](#)

TW// child death, weaponry, blood and injury, mention of brainwashing, past abuse, hallucination mention, brief mention of a suicide attempt, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy has the rug pulled out from under him, he's panicked but oddly calm. Niki is a Black Widow, she's like him. They're cut from the same rock, made of the same dirt.

But she could be sent by the Room to kill him, could be here to drag him back or put a bullet between his eyes.

She seems to sense his distress, making no move to approach him. Instead, she says, "I'm not a Widow anymore, just like how I'm assuming you're not a Huntsman anymore."

He blinks at her as something eases in his chest. He's still a little on-guard, a little worried this is a trap but he likes Niki. He wants to be able to trust her.

"You said you'd explain," he says, still in Russian.

She nods. "I got out a couple of years ago, lived in Germany until Phil showed up and I had to save Wil's life. He offered me a job, thinking I was only a merc for hire."

"You own a bakery," he breathes in surprise and she smiles at him, something soft in her eyes.

"I've always wanted to bake," she says with a shrug. "I still have my contacts from my Room days but I only work if I want to."

Tommy stares at her, asks the question that's been bubbling inside of him since he realised. "How did you get out?"

She flexes her feet, pointing them out and drawing them back in. They never lose eye contact.

“I had taken one of the recruits under my wing,” she says, slowly, even as her tone is thick with pain. “She was good, so good. The best Odette I had ever seen.”

Her eyes grow distant and Tommy knows where this is going. She has the same look his brothers have. It’s one of loss and longing, the pain they can’t ever feel or express in fear of punishment.

It’s older spiders, drawing younger ones to their web to teach them how to hunt, only for the silk holding them secure to be cruelly snapped. The older spider will cling on but the younger will fall.

“They shot her in the courtyard,” she breathes, “used her as target practice. One of the younger girls used to make flowers grow on her unmarked grave.”

When Niki drops the distant look from her eyes, they’re burning. “I rigged the place, made sure to keep the dorms safe and went after Eret but-“

“They’re untouchable,” Tommy comments, removes the switchblade from his pocket and begins to play with it. Niki doesn’t look surprised or concerned. “I found that out when I tried to shoot them from my sniper’s perch. I couldn’t make myself pull the trigger. Just like I can’t-“

He freezes and her smile grows softer, sadder. “It’s ingrained in us to survive,” she murmurs. “They couldn’t have had their perfect spiders dying so quickly by their own hand.”

He blinks, flips the blade, catches it.

He doesn’t like to think about how hard he tried and how easily he failed. He doesn’t like to remember Dream, appearing as a hallucination, trying to console him as Tommy sobbed.

Thankfully, Niki moves on.

“I thought I was free,” she continues, “until a year ago when Phil was tracking down paperwork relating to Ranboo and I followed. I wanted to see the proper Russian ballet, one more time.”

“They tried to kill you,” Tommy says, remembering the conversation and Niki rolls her eyes, leans back against the barre.

“Phil mentioned he spoke to Theseus about it,” she says, wicked glint to her eyes. “I was the one that suggested talking to Theseus about it.”

“Well, you were right.” He shrugs, flips the blade, catches it. “So the Widows were there? I assume they noticed the minute you stepped foot in Moscow.”

She sighs, looks at the floor before meeting his gaze again. “I don’t know. Maybe. All I know is that a ballerina tried to shoot me in the bathroom. I- I remembered her: Minx. She was younger than me but it hit me then that I had been unsuccessful. The Room wasn’t gone.”

Tommy nods. “I don’t- if you did blow it up, I don’t remember it.”

They share a look. He remembers the Widows and Spiders strung up to be shot after trying to run. He always assumed it was impossible to leave.

How many more are out there? How many more got out and so they all had to be wiped?

His memory is unreliable, wisps of knowledge tied together with thin threads. Maybe his mind is a spiderweb of lies, of strands held together by sheer determination and will, used to catch his prey but not to save him.

Webs are only strong when catching prey. They're not strong enough to save the spider who created it.

It's why Widows lure their prey in and Huntsman hunt. Less time is spent on the need to be presentable, more time is spent on killing.

"How did you get out?" She asks, pulling him free from his thoughts and he twirls the blade around his fingers.

"Blew it up after trying to snipe Eret." Tommy replies. "I don't- I have a strange feeling it didn't work though."

"They made spiders but I swear they're cockroaches," she replies and he laughs at the analogy, a raw sound. "Never able to kill them."

"I just want to be free," he tells her. "I'm out, they can't control me, they can't make me kill but it's like a lingering presence, like eyes on the back of my head."

She hums in agreement. "I felt like that when I first got out and when I returned from Russia. I didn't feel safe but now Phil knows, it's- it's easier. I can trust him." She looks up at him eyes twinkling. "When did you realise Phil was the Angel?"

"When I entered his home and saw him trying to hide his wings," he replies, his own back aching.

Niki rolls her eyes. "He can be so obvious sometimes."

"How much does he know?" Tommy asks, not interested in Phil's terrible ability at concealing his past. "About you, about the Room?"

"I told him the basics," she says, flexing her feet. "I told him that I was trained as an assassin and that I got out. I told him I had it covered, that searching for them would be a dead end. That's all. I tried to not divulge too much but he seems to have found out more since you showed up."

He frowns. "He may be shit at hiding his identity but he's quick to connect the dots. He heard my Russian accent and paired it with his knowledge of the Room from you. That's how he knows I'm a Huntsman: it's on their files."

So they have been recording and watching him for a long time, waiting for the day he either succeeds or fails.

“He learnt this from you being a vigilante,” she says with a slight head tilt. “You’ve been active on the streets, Theseus.”

He shakes his head, swallows. “Can you- I know it’s my vigilante name but please call me Tommy. I’m not him, not when I’m not wearing the gear.”

He face softens. “Of course,” she says, reaching for him. He allows the contact of her hand stilling his knife-flipping one. “I apologise, Tommy.”

“If anyone would get it, it would be you.”

She laughs, pink hair bobbing. “I was Nikita. Then I was Black Widow.”

They share a look. He squeezes her hand. “Twenty-eight to one,” he whispers and she squeezes back.

“Twenty-eight to one.”

They are so different than yet so alike. Trained the same, gaining the same title, blowing the Room up on their exit. A Huntsman and a Widow.

“I wanted to wipe the red from my ledger,” he tells her. “If I killed the bad people, maybe I could help someone, maybe I could be more than the trained killer they made me.”

“Our past will always be apart of us,” she replies in a soft tone. “We may never escape it but we can heal from it. It’s why I brought you here: I wanted you to know that you’re not alone. You said no one understands you: I do. I’ve been there.”

He does something he would be punished for. He falls into her arms. She hugs him tightly back, pulling him close.

Tommy tries to push the tears back but they spring up, falling from his eyes onto Niki’s shoulder. She doesn’t push him away, doesn’t shush him.

She holds him.

For the first time - maybe since forever, maybe since he bonded with his brothers - Tommy allows himself to be vulnerable.

With the music in the background, they end up sitting on the floor discussing the Room in their native Russian.

He tells her about his abilities, blinking away tears as she rubs soothing circles into his hand. She tells him he isn’t a monster.

He doesn’t agree.

Niki has water abilities. Like a fish, she can breathe under water and swim faster. She also has a singing voice so sweet, she lures people in.

“They used to call me a siren,” she says as he begins to stretch out his legs. “It’s how I survived. My voice would keep them away.”

For a moment, they sit and stretch. A Widow and a Huntsman: two sides of the same coin.

Between them, they’ve probably amounted more kills than some professionals. They became the weapon, used and exploited. But they both got out. They both survived.

“Dance with me,” she says, back to her German accent, back to English.

“Okay,” he replies, in his English accent, back to English.

Down the hall, he can hear them working on their steps, working on perfecting the timing. They don’t need to do that: their movements are fluid, in sync.

Once she’s thrown him some spare pointe shoes - she seems to have had this theory about him for a while - and he’s broken them in, they wait for the music to switch over. Then, like it’s all they’ve ever known, they dance.

Here, there is no eagle eyed teacher waiting for him to make a mistake, for him to fall. Here, it is just him and his partner, rising and falling. Here, he is Tommy and she is Niki.

He smiles and feels lighter than he has in a long time.

Hannah is a Black Widow Theseus meets on many occasions. She is like him: underestimated and quick to use that to her advantage.

She controls plants, manipulating the Earth in the image she wants. Flowers sprout up when she walks if she doesn’t actively try to control them.

They don’t really speak to one another. It’s forbidden to have friendships but they’re paired up so frequently, he can’t help but look forward to seeing her.

Unlike Dream, George and Sappnap, she’s like him: a recruit. They’re still training, still learning and he enjoys her company.

Until one day, she seems to splinter under the pressure.

Vines crawl up the walls as her Handler shouts trigger after trigger, nothing subduing her, nothing stopping her as she screams and sobs.

There are flowers in her ears, blocking the noise. It’s smart but it won’t save her. She has to know this.

The woman finds Theseus and places a glock in his hands.

He walks past the guards, past Widows trying to calm her and Huntsman trying to limit the damage. He stalks up to her because like her, he, too, is underestimated.

“We’re children!” She screams. “They killed her, they killed my friend!”

Theseus understands, then, why she’s doing thing but he knows what must be done. Friendships lead to complacency and complacency leads to death.

He will not die. He will survive.

Theseus nods, mouths, “I’m sorry.”

He shoots her in the stomach in spring. The plants immediately begin to wither and die as she falls. Blood stains the front of her uniform, mouth open in a silent gasp.

Dream has to pull him away from staring at her body. They share a look, a haunted one and Theseus is reminded that he probably wasn’t the first recruit Dream felt attached to. How many more did he lose?

That night, he stares at his veins and is reminded of her.

That morning, her name is wiped from his memory.

Maybe it’s because he’s running the high of knowing he’s not alone. Niki is like him, Niki understands.

She also knows that Tommy will run if the Room is still active, he won’t fight. He is not powerful enough to take on the entire Room and even if he is a coward for it, he will run.

She respects his decision. Just like he respects hers for not getting involved.

So after his impromptu ballet lesson - even after the months not dancing, muscle memory is a strong thing - he decided to head back to his apartment. He had lunch and then fell asleep, gun in one hand, Henry in the other.

Which brings him to now: patrolling in the early morning.

He’s not after anyone in particular, he just enjoys the freedom he gets from tapping into his Huntsman and racing across rooftops. It reminds him of Dream: he always loved running, using his athleticism to his advantage.

The only problem with that is, while he’s dodging a lot of the Heroes, something keeps tugging him towards someone in particular.

Only, tonight, that someone isn’t alone.

Tommy takes one look at Phil and the Captain and tries to retreat as silently as possible. He toes away from the roof but it’s too late. Phil has already turned to him, sensing his presence.

“Wait!” He shouts.

Despite all of his training, Tommy listens. He pauses, looks behind him to see Phil with his hands out in a surrender, slowly approaching like Tommy is a feral animal.

“I just want to talk, mate,” he says. “Please.”

“I’,” Tommy mocks, Russian accent coating his words and Phil winces, wings flexing and curling.

“The Captain-“

“I can leave if you want me to,” she says, stepping up beside Phil, showing her hands. “It would be easier if we all had the same information, though.”

He eyes her warily, so thankful his face is obscured by his mask and hood. His curiosity really is going to kill him one day.

“Talk about what?” He asks, hand resting on his gun but not reaching for it. In a strange way, he knows Phil and the Captain don’t want to harm or cage him.

They look between each other and Phil turns back, plague mask obscuring his identity.

“You,” he says, calmly. “About the Red Room.”

Tommy shakes his head. “I do not want to talk about either of those.”

“Then let me talk and you can correct me,” Phil says, patiently. “Please.”

Tommy frowns at him and then nods. It’s always best to know what the opposition have, especially when it comes to information. Especially when it comes to anything regarding the Room.

“Children are taken and put through a program,” he starts, both of them studying Tommy as he remains still. “This program produces Black Widows and Huntsman Spiders. They are turned into assassins. Am I right so far?”

Tommy knows Niki told him very little and wonders when he found this out, how he did. On those files, is his treatment mentioned, his abilities, the trials and tribulations he lived through?

Is there a comprehensive list of the people he’s killed?

“Yes,” he says, finds himself surrounded by his brothers. Dream behind him, George to the right, Sappnap to the left. They look to him curiously before looking at Phil and the Captain with strange gazes.

Dream’s face does something very strange as he steps up beside Tommy. It scrunches up, eyes wide at the sight of the Hero and George wraps a tentative hand around Dream’s wrist, a silent declaration of solidarity.

Tommy doesn’t understand it.

Phil turns to the Captain and then back to Tommy. "You told Morningstar about a graduation process. After that, you become a Huntsman?"

He nods. "Yes."

He doesn't know why he's answering his questions but Tommy misses the men at his back, he misses feeling like he belonged.

Wilbur has been nothing but kind to him and Niki trusts this man. A Black Widow trusts him and that means something. Tommy may not trust Phil yet but he likes him, and it's not like Tommy is the one revealing the secrets.

He's just not disagreeing with them.

"How old are you?" The Captain asks before Phil can speak and Dream shudders, face pale.

"How is the real?" He breathes and Tommy refuses to acknowledge his hallucinations, even as George has the same distressed gaze.

"They wiped us," he replies in the same hushed tone. "They rewrote what we saw."

Tommy looks to her and says, ignoring the other two as Sapnap raises his eyebrows at them in question, "why does it matter?"

"Because, as a mother, if you're a teenager, I need to know you're okay," she says and Dream's face falls even more ashen.

"Dream, who the fuck is she?" Sapnap asks but Dream just shakes his head, staring at her face like he's memorising it.

"I'm okay," Tommy replies, wondering why his brothers haven't left yet. "I'm fine. I can look after myself."

"Theseus," she says, "if the Red Room is still active--"

"Which it is," George says, firmly, looking at Tommy.

"-and they're hunting you like you keep implying, a child shouldn't have that weight on their shoulders." The Captain finishes and Tommy frowns at George briefly before looking back to her.

Is this what they found out? Do they know he's sixteen and that's why they suddenly want to involve themselves?

"Is that why you care? I'm a child and so that means I should be protected?" He spits, fists clenching at his sides. "There were twenty-eight of us, twenty-eight every generation and they whittle that down to one."

Sapnap steps closer to him and Tommy can feel his warmth. It's disorientating, to be so close to Sapnap when he's not even real.

The Captain's face shatters before him and she lifts a shaky hand to her face. Phil's wings pull around him, in a sign of comfort. Dream steps closer to the Captain, only to be pulled back by George.

"Twenty-eight children are killed down until there's one?" Phil breathes and Tommy blinks.

"Yes." Ignoring Dream's odd behaviour, Tommy continues, "only one can make it to the graduation ceremony."

"How old are you when that happens?" Phil asks, voice strained.

"Old enough," Tommy replies.

The woman said that the younger, the better as the older they get, the more her ability tends to rip their very being apart. The younger they are means they're closer to their own creation, which fuels her ability.

The Captain looks away. Phil steps closer.

"Theseus," he says, "we want to offer you our help. We don't want you to be forced to run."

"I can handle it," he says, firmly. "I'll leave soon anyway. I just have some loose ends to tie."

Wilbur and Quackity and Niki. Tubbo and Ranboo and Charlie. Purpled and Punz.

He doesn't think he can just walk away anymore. God help him, he cares for these people. He can just imagine the punishment the Room would give him for declaring that.

"Mate, you don't have to do this alone," Phil says.

Tommy can't shake the feeling of the three men beside him. Words burn in his throat, making his tongue feel like lead in his mouth.

Tommy wasn't alone before. He had Dream and Sapnap and George. In the Room, he couldn't help but care for them, want them to be the family his memory led him to believe they were.

They he blew up the Room while they were sleeping and ran.

"I wasn't alone!" He hisses, angered, confused as to why the hallucinations still haven't left him. "I wasn't alone, I had a family and I betrayed them!"

The Captain reels back, eyes blown wide in shock. Phil's wing flex out as his mask stares Tommy down.

"Destroying the place that hurt you-" Phil tries to say but Tommy shakes his head.

"I could've saved them and I didn't." He spits. "I betrayed them."

“You didn’t betray us, little spider,” Dream says, voice soft as George and Sapnap nod vehemently behind him. Tommy shudders at the words. “You made me- made us so proud. You got out, Theseus. That’s not betrayal, that’s survival.”

“You’re not real,” he bristles under his breath. “You’re all in my head.”

“The first time I saw you, I thought you’d be the first to fall,” George says, cold, clinical, calm. “I even told Dream to not get his hopes up, that you were weak. But you survived. You kept surviving. So much so, you reminded me of me, of a younger me that would rather die than fail.”

George leans closer, eyes burning. “Don’t you dare tell me I’m lying to you. This is real, Theseus. I assume it’s your power manifesting but listen to me: this is real. We’re alive and so is the Room.”

“Theseus?” Phil calls from across to him and Tommy draws his gaze away from George’s intense stare.

“Leave me alone,” he shouts and maybe he’s screaming it to the Villain and Hero opposite but maybe he’s also screaming it to his brothers.

As he runs from the roof, ignoring the shouts behind him and the yells from his brothers, he stumbles into his apartment and sobs.

They’re not real. They can’t be.

If they’re real, then it means the Room is still active and if the Room is still active, then Tommy’s time is running out.

Clutching Henry to his chest, he cries until he passes out.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts lads, thoughts?? I mean, we’re getting close to proper plot soooooonnn ;)

Thank you for your support!! You better be taking care of yourselves... :)

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

And we're back!!!

[My Discord, come chat to me](#)

TW// child death mention, body horror, slight gore, past abuse, past brainwashing, blood and injury, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Waking up isn't easy. He's still wearing his Huntsman gear and somehow in the night, his hand has latched onto the gun under his pillow.

He feels raw, like the pieces of him have crumbled under the weight of his life.

Phil, and now the Captain know about him, about the Room. They're only unsure of who exactly he is but how long will it take them to work it out? He's hiding but in plain sight and sooner or later, the web of protection around himself will fall to pieces.

Not to mention what George said. The hallucination but supposedly not.

Does that mean when Tommy first hallucinated Dream, on the floor of his bedroom, gun pointed at his temple, Dream was actually there? Did he see the state Tommy was in? Is that why he looked so broken?

Tommy doesn't quite believe it, even if George said something his own mind could never come up with.

It isn't until he removes his gear and takes a shower - so cold with terrible pressure - that he remembers the man he killed in the warehouse. Back then, Tommy assumed he was suffering hallucinations as the man spoke to thin air, reaching out for something that wasn't there.

Was that man talking to other people that Tommy couldn't see?

And Tommy-

He swallows, remembers removing the blade from his neck.

He steps out, puts on the baggiest clothes he can find and curls up on his bed with Henry clutched in his hands.

“You’re real,” he whispers and Dream appears before him, looking like he just woke up.

“Hello, little spider,” he greets and Tommy shudders. “Finally acknowledged the truth?”

Tommy just looks at him. “You’re alive,” he whispers and Dream’s eyes soften, the scar harsh across his face, giving him a menacing aura.

“Yes, Theseus, we are.” He looks around his apartment. “You’re getting stronger.”

“If I use it, I don’t lose it,” he recites the woman’s words. He looks up at Dream and says, “I never wanted it.”

Dream smiles at him, green eyes warmth. “I know. But you have it now and I think it’s better if you keep it.”

“So Eret knows where I am to kill me?” Tommy replies, bitterly, clutching Henry tighter.

Dream shakes his head. “No,” he says, voice straining before he swallows. “No. We’re not going to let that happen-“

“We both know if he tells you, none of you can refuse a direct order,” Tommy interrupts, darkly.

Dream looks down at Henry and then out of the windows. “I- I have a plan.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “When do you not?”

“Shut up, Theseus,” Dream sighs but his eyes are light as he briefly looks back at Tommy.

“It’s Tommy, now.” He replies, voice hard. “Not Theseus. I’m not theirs anymore.”

Dream nods, eyes sparking with pride. “Tommy,” he says, trying the name out. “Well, Tommy, I have a plan. I’m- I’m remembering things with the chair gone - well done for doing that, by the way - and it won’t be long until we can see each other again.”

Tommy furrows his brow. “In the non-killing me way?”

Dream laughs that familiar wheeze, Tommy’s chest aches. “C’mon now, no killing you at all.”

“Good,” Tommy smiles and the phone rings. As Tommy turns to find it, Dream disappears between blinks.

For a long moment, Tommy stares at the place Dream inhabited, wishing he would come back. He misses him, god, does he miss him.

He doesn’t know how his ability works - mostly it’s stressful situations - and so he can’t properly utilise it effectively.

The ringing continues and Tommy reluctantly rises to his feet to grab the buzzing phone from his kitchen counter. He presses the answer button and Tubbo's voice comes through the line.

"Boss man!" He greets. "Boo and I are having a BuzzFeed Unsolved marathon. Want to join?"

"I-" Tommy clears his throat. "I don't know if I'm going to be the best of company right now, Tubso."

"Then we'll cheer you up," Tubbo counters. "Come on, get your detective brain on. If you can breakdown the Purge killings, I'm sure you can work out who killed JFK."

Tommy doesn't want to assume but he wouldn't be surprised if the Room had something to do with that.

"You're not going to take no for an answer, are you?" He sighs and Tubbo laughs.

"No, I'm not. Don't make me send Ranboo to teleport you over."

Tommy groans but twenty minutes later, he's sitting in their living room, watching two men discuss possible leads on cold cases. It's interesting, he won't lie, but his mind is mostly preoccupied with Dream and his predicaments.

The Villains and Heroes know about the Room, they know about him. Dream and Sapnap and George are alive, he didn't kill them in the explosion but so is Eret, which means the Room is still active. At least he has confirmation that he destroyed the chair.

Niki is a former Black Widow, which means he really needs to relay information to her about the Room. Knowing Phil and her friendship, he's already told her about what he's discovered about Tommy.

Either way, Dream confirmed that he's being hunted by the Room and that it is only a matter time before he sees his brothers again. He just doesn't know what version of them he will meet.

The men he grew up around, the men that would pull their punches and answer Tommy's endless questions. Or, the men that are purely Huntsman Spiders, that are there to bring him back or kill him, that have been triggered to simply do as they're told.

The episode changes.

"-today we cover the case of Sveta Isakova, a nine year old girl that was found dead in her burning house with her pinky finger cut off at the scene of her birthday party." The presenter, Ryan Bergara, says through the TV speakers.

Tommy stills.

"Her pinky finger?" The other presenter, Shane Madej, hisses. "Damn, that's sick."

Tommy focuses on the TV screen and nearly faints at the picture of the little girl, the one he met at the sweet stand, the one he led to her bedroom to see her dollhouse.

The one he killed.

He would've been ten, maybe eleven. He wants to be sick.

Sometimes, he's realises, the Room did them a kindness by removing memories but they only ever removed the ones they didn't want him to have.

Memories like these, the ones that plague his dreams, are the ones they leave behind.

The presenters bicker between themselves as Tubbo says, "okay, so the finger must mean something right? I mean the parents refusing to involve police? Suspicious."

"The father was working for the Russian government involving testing children's abilities," Ranboo says, leaning forward as his fingers fiddle with his mask. "Maybe he annoyed the wrong customer?"

"Inside job!" Tubbo insists. "On her birthday? My money is on the dad."

Tommy can't draw his eyes from her photograph, she looks so young. At the time, he was just doing his job, following orders, proving himself capable.

Still, the knowledge that he was the one to do that to her leaves bile crawling up his throat.

He really is a monster isn't he?

"What do you think Tommy?" Tubbo asks, looking at him, wings fluttering behind him. "Inside job, government hit or pissed off customer?"

Tommy nearly laughs at the irony of that question. "Government hit," he says, confidently, remembering the way Sapnap had hit a button on his disposable cellphone and the eleven-bed house had gone up in flames.

"Yeah?" Ranboo looks over Tubbo's head.

Tommy nods, swallowing down the bile. "Who would kill a little girl and remove a finger if it wasn't about a message?"

Tubbo clicks at him. "Oooo, yeah, that actually sounds believable."

Tommy nods again, can feel his mind trying to slip into that forest. He knew he shouldn't have come here, knew he should've stayed at his apartment and tried to sleep off his emotions.

Now he knows his kills count as cold cases for conspiracy theories.

God, he can just imagine dropping the truth onto them: the Russian government fuelling a program that turns children into killers and one of them, a ten year old boy, killed this nine

year old girl for a reason he never found out. He assumes the internet would break.

“Tubso,” he says, standing, “boob boy, I forgot I have a job to do, so I’ll be heading out.”

“You good?” Ranboo asks and Tommy smiles at him, fake but good enough to pass.

“Yeah,” he lies. “Sorry to disrupt-“

“It’s no bother,” Ranboo replies, warmth in his tone.

“We like hanging out with you,” Tubbo adds. The girl - Sveta, her name was Sveta - is still on the screen. “You’re our friend, Tommy. You’re never going to disrupt us.”

Tommy wants to cry. There is a photo of a little girl he murdered on the screen and these two in front of him are saying he’s their friend. How can he be?

Tommy is a monster, a cold-blooded killer.

One that needs to leave before he gets too attached. He just can’t seem to bring himself to and that hurts more than anything the Room did to him because he will have to run sooner or later, or run the risk of involving them and subsequently watching them die.

As Tommy leaves, he leaves with the urge to be sick and a heavy heart beating in his chest.

When Theseus wakes up, he’s in the dorm room, empty of the other twenty-seven inhabitants.

He feels like he’s been pulled apart and put back together again. Everything aches and he winces as he lifts his head, a pounding in his skull.

He lays there, blanket pulled to his chin and starts to stretch out his aching limbs. Only then, when he’s able to feel pins-and-needles, does he sit up.

The door to his dorm opens, Dream immediately makes eye contact and sighs.

“Easy, little spider,” Dream murmurs as he sits beside him. Theseus shudders at the name. “You’re a Huntsman Spider now. You survived.”

“What now?” Theseus asks, rubbing at his eyes.

“You don’t want to know what she did?” Dream hits back and Theseus shrugs.

“She said she created the universe and that I was going to help destroy it,” he says. “What more is there to know?”

Something like pity burns in Dream’s eyes as Theseus stares at the scar he gave him.

“You’re going to age,” Dream says, voice calm. “Slowly. Very slowly. George thinks it stops at twenty-five, that’s what happened to the other Spiders and Widows. After that, you won’t

die by any internal factor, and you'll heal quicker. You won't need doctors anymore. You'll be faster and stronger too."

Theseus nods, notes that down in his mind and gently prods at Dream's cheek. "I'll just scar."

Dream rolls his eyes, takes his hand and flips a blade out from his sleeve. Theseus doesn't flinch, he simply watches as Dream cuts a thin line across his hand.

A couple of seconds pass and the cut is nothing more than a thin line.

"Cool," he says and Dream gives his hand a gentle squeeze before dropping it, the blade disappearing up his sleeve.

"As for what now," Dream says, "now you rest. Call it a vacation for a month. You're free to do as you please so long as you return for training at the end of the month."

Theseus nods. A vacation does sound nice. Even if it means sleeping in this empty dorm for a couple of weeks. It will give him time to think, time to plan.

"Theseus," Dream says, oddly serious. "Be smart."

He looks up at Dream and smiles, a dangerous smile. "You know that I will be."

This is the day Theseus' plan begins.

"Where can I punch something?" Tommy asks as he enters Niki's Bakery. She takes one look at him - the paleness to his face, the hollow look to his eyes - and frowns.

"Eight, two, five, five," she says. "Follow the route to the ballet studio, turn down that road and there's a gym I frequent. That's the code that will let you in."

"Eight, two, five, five." He repeats and smiles at her, tiredly. "Thank you."

"Tommy," she calls before he can even take a step. "What was it?"

He looks to his shoes and then meets her eyes. "Buzzfeed fucking Unsolved."

"Ah," she says, eyes softening. "I know it might not help but, if you didn't do it, you'd be dead, too."

He swallows. "She was nine."

Niki's eyes soften even more. "And you had a gun to your head."

"I know," he says, voice strained. "I just- I feel like shit and I have every right to because I murdered a little girl but I- I feel--"

"Survivor's guilt," Niki says. "That's what you're feeling. You lived but someone else died and you feel like you should've also died."

Tommy's face scrunches up. "That sounds like something to do with the mind and we don't talk about that."

"I know you're not telling anyone but Puffy is amazing." Niki leans back, smile to her face. "She works part-time as a counsellor."

"So you're having therapy?"

Niki laughs. "Tommy, I'm dating her. I haven't told her about the Room but I've alluded to my past being terrible. She talks about it with me."

He blinks. "Oh. Cool. I love women."

Niki rolls her eyes. "So do I but what I'm trying to say is: even if it's me, talk to someone about it. Don't bottle this up. We lived through hell and we survived. You should be proud of yourself for that."

He ducks his head. "Even if I couldn't have saved her... what about my brothers? What about the Widows and the Spiders I left behind because I wanted a taste of freedom?"

Niki pushes forward. Leaning over the counter, she gently grabs the sides of his face with her hands. "Tommy, I did the same thing. I bet there are more that got out and you can't beat yourself up over what you could've done. You got out and so did I. We are survivors."

There's a heaviness that sits between them as Tommy digests the words.

Tommy once believed survival was everything and then that failure was worse than death. He fought and he bled and he killed for an organisation that only ever saw him as a number.

Twenty-eight to one.

Generations culled into one sole Huntsman and Widow.

He finds it strange that all he wanted to do during the Room was survive yet the minute he's free, he doesn't seem to want to anymore. Life is hard without the structures they put in place.

Out here, it's opinions and thoughts and things Tommy has never been allowed to indulge in. He can choose. For the first time in his life he has free will and choice and it's baffling, it's terrifying.

Huntsman Spiders aren't weak or scared of anything but as Sapnap would say, Tommy isn't a spider anymore.

He's a person.

How does he be a person when he's never been one before?

"We did survive," he agrees, pulling away. He makes his way to the door, opening it to hear the bell chime. He pauses before he steps out and says, "but at what cost?"

He leaves before she can call him back and wanders until he finds the ballet studio. Following Niki's instructions, he ends up stumbling upon a bricked up building with a glass door.

He types in the code on the control panel and the door swings open.

He's met with the familiar scent of sweat and metal and paint.

It's an open space, mostly mats and a few machines scattered around and in the centre, there's a boxing ring. There's an upstairs that looks like a yoga studio and a door to the side with an arrow that says in thick lettering: POOL.

Tommy turns from the boxing ring, noting the five people on the floor he's on and the sound of a couple more above and turns to where the punching bags are.

Removing his jacket - he may be losing the switchblade but his shoes still have throwing stars in - he briefly wonders if he should wrap his hands. Not that he'll need it. He was trained to fight bare-knuckle, injuries and blood a norm.

Stepping up, he cracks his neck and stretches out his limbs.

After a quick warmup, he clenches his hands into fists, lowers his centre of gravity and lets the Huntsman take over.

With each hit and kick, he thinks of that little girl. He thinks of the other names and faces he's killed. He thinks of Dream's scar and George's careful hands and Sapnap's fiery eyes. He thinks of the girl who loved plants, of the boy with Icarus' wings, of Niki. He thinks of the woman's smile and Eret's grin.

He loses himself to the repetition, the hits calming him.

Punch after punch. Kick after kick.

It isn't until the hairs on the back of his neck rise that he pauses, catching the bag as it swings back and turns. Behind him, a familiar face greets him, one that's accompanied by long, pink hair and crimson eyes.

"I don't remember giving you the code," Technoblade grumbles and Tommy sighs, barely out of breath.

"Niki gave it to me, bitch," Tommy snaps, gestures to the bag, noticing the pink of his knuckles. "Needed to punch shit."

"I can see that," Technoblade drawls. "Are you okay, kid?"

Tommy rolls his eyes. "Fuck off."

"Bruh, I'm being nice here and checking up on," Technoblade says, leaning back and crossing his arms over his chest. "Especially when you're in my gym and my brother seems to be attached to you."

“Your gym?” Tommy asks with an eyebrow raise. “How rich is your family?”

Technoblade’s lips quirk. “Well off.”

Tommy groans. “God, you’re fucking annoying. Can I get back to, you know, punching shit?”

Technoblade studies him and says, “for a kid, you’ve got surprisingly good form.”

“Thanks,” Tommy replies, “my brothers taught me.”

George and how to be quick, Sapnap and how to be strong, Dream and how to be the best.

“Brothers?” Technoblade asks.

Tommy blinks at him. “Wilbur didn’t mention- oh that bastard proving me wrong by keeping my secrets.”

“He likes proving people wrong,” Technoblade says. “So what’s this about brothers?”

Tommy shrugs, picking at the punching bag with his nails. “Shitty past. I got out, they didn’t. Wil told me they’d be proud of me for being okay now but I don’t- I left them behind. That makes me shitty and selfish.”

He heard the real Dream say he was proud, that all of them were but he doesn’t believe him. Tommy abandoned them. He didn’t save his brothers.

“That makes you human,” Technoblade replies, voice dropping into something softer. “Saving yourself is self-preservation, it’s instinctual. Sometimes you have to be selfish to survive.”

Tommy looks at Technoblade, and tries to study him. Is this the same man he shot on the roof? Is this the infamous Blood God, the one Tommy easily took down?

Here, like this, in sweatpants and a vest, hair tied sloppily in a bun, he looks normal. He doesn’t look like the Villain he is.

“You’re the eldest, right?” Tommy asks and Technoblade nods. “If you were in a shitty, I’m-going-to-die situation and Wil ran and left you behind, would you be proud of him?”

Technoblade tilts his head, contemplating his answer. Unlike Wilbur, whose words are his weapon with his pretty lies, Technoblade should tell him the truth. He doesn’t have a reason to lie.

“Yes,” the man settles on. “I would be. If it came down to a me-or-him situation, I’m always going to choose him. Just like he’d always choose me. It’s what family does.”

Tommy nods, digesting this. He leans his head forward onto the bag in his hands and takes a deep breath.

“Thank you,” Tommy says and a hand comes to rest on his shoulder, oddly gentle.

“I can’t speak for them but as an older brother, I can say that they would be proud.” Technoblade says, slowly. “If they’re not, I’ll gladly punch some sense into them.”

It makes Tommy laugh. If he took down Technoblade with ease, Dream would have no problem.

Well, that’s if Technoblade hasn’t learnt his lesson. The odds are definitely tipped in his favour if Wilbur or Phil are on standby.

“Your family is fucking weird, Technoblade,” Tommy settles on as he pulls away and looks at Technoblade.

He rolls his eyes. “Thanks, child. Call me Techno.”

“I’m not a fucking child,” Tommy groans and Techno smiles at him, even if it looks like more of a smirk.

“Whatever you say,” he breathes, dropping his hand and walking away before calling, “child.”

Tommy hisses at him but it cuts off when he hears Techno laugh, sees the way his shoulders shake.

He feels lighter.

He will never escape the images of his past but he thinks he should take Niki’s advice.

He’ll have to run soon, might as well make the most of the people here while he can.

Chapter End Notes

Is Shane Madej a demon? Maybe. Am I mourning BuzzFeed Unsolved? Also maybe.

Thank you so much for your support and take care of yourselves too.

(Pssst: next chapter involves reveals)

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

So, this chapter signifies Part Two, which is pretty much Plot ;)

TW// past abuse, past brainwashing, mentions of death and killing, blood and injury, weaponry, mentions of seizures, swearing

Buckle in, it's going to be a bumpy ride :)

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You’ve never heard of Drake and Josh but you know Eurovision?” Tubbo asks, antennae flicking back and forth and Tommy sighs.

“I’ll have you know it’s the best bit of TV since, well, ever.”

Wilbur rolls his eyes. “Coming from the child who’s literally never watched TV before.”

Tommy hasn’t seen much media other than the pieces the Room made him consume but he has heard about Eurovision. Mostly because he was sent with George to poison someone there. George, of course, used it as a training exercise, making Tommy translate the songs they heard back to Russian.

“Fuck off, sick boy,” Tommy hisses at him and Wilbur sticks his tongue out at him. “Ew. You’re disgusting. If you make me sick, I’m suing. Big Q will have my back.”

Wilbur’s reasoning for not seeing Tommy? He’s caught the flu. Obviously Tommy knows it’s because of the gunshot he gave him but it is funny to see the entire family lie about it.

“The fact that I can’t disagree,” Phil mutters, shoving a popcorn bowl into Techno’s hands. “Quackity would definitely try and help you out.”

Tommy grins at the man. “Did you know, Philza Minecraft, the best of men, that Q mentioned that he and Wil-“

Wilbur, despite having a bullet in his shoulder a couple of days ago, lunges across the distance, and clamps a hand over Tommy’s mouth. He instantly bites and Wilbur hisses a string of curses.

“And you say I’m disgusting,” Wilbur groans.

“I’ll cut you,” Tommy threatens.

“Not the couch,” Ranboo mutters, walking into the room to sit beside Tubbo. “Blood is so hard to scrub out.”

“Then make sure Wilbur keeps his filthy hands to himself.” Tommy snaps.

“Can we just watch Eurovision?” Techno drawls. “I don’t want to be here but if we watch it then I can leave.”

“Aw, is Tech getting annoyed at the social interaction?” Wilbur coos as Techno rolls his eyes.

“Wil, I will literally-“

“What’s Eurovision?” Ranboo asks and Tommy stares at him.

“Disgusting American.”

Phil chuckles. “Psychological warfare involving singing, dancing and bright colours. Europe didn’t want to have another war so this is the way they try and stop it.”

“Even if it’s a political minefield of old allies and shitting on Britain.” Wilbur adds.

Techno nods around a mouth of popcorn. “As they should.”

Tubbo throws something at Techno. He catches it with ease and Tommy only then notices that it’s the remote.

Tubbo gives Tommy a look. “Filthy American.”

Tommy grins and then looks to Ranboo. “How don’t you know about Eurovision?”

“I’ve heard about it but Techno and I usually don’t watch it,” he shrugs. “I forgot. Bad memory day.”

Tommy can sympathise. There are things he will never remember and there are memories that will always haunt him.

Sometimes reality and fiction blur. The house he supposedly lived in, the care that the woman gave him. They’re lies, he knows, but they’re so strong in his mind he forgets occasionally.

He wants them to be real. Maybe that’s why they don’t leave him.

Graham Norton’s voice filters through the speakers, already being sarcastic as he introduces the contestants. Tommy leans further back into the couch.

He’s in his usual spot, with his gaze to the exit. Wilbur is laying across the couch, trying to put his feet in Tommy’s lap every time Tommy shoves his feet back to the floor. His head is in Phil’s lap - the man keeps rolling his shoulders and Tommy wishes he could tell him that

he doesn't have to be uncomfortable and hide his wings - who sits next to Techno. In front of Techno, Ranboo and Tubbo occupy the curve of the couch.

Tommy turns to the screen and listens, always hoping they'll sing in their native language. It helps him with his vocabulary to hear them.

He tries to not make it known that he understands the Russian as Wilbur sloppily translates some of it. Tommy catches himself multiple times trying not to laugh.

He finds Switzerland's soothing and it's clear he's the only one who understands it as Techno ends up googling the English translation.

He does find it funny that Germany's is about not feeling hate and then Finland's is all about putting a middle finger up. God, he loves Eurovision.

Ukraine makes him smile, head banging along as the others sit wide eyed at the sound. It doesn't take long for Tubbo and Ranboo to join in with his head banging though, leaving Phil looking bewildered.

Italy has them all staring at the screen, even if Tommy is the only one to understand the lyrics.

"I'm voting for them," Wilbur mutters and Tommy nods.

"I agree with the bitch boy."

"Seconded," Tubbo breathes as Ranboo nods.

Techno shrugs, "I don't know, I feel like--"

Tommy can tell immediately he's saying it just to get a reaction so he remains silent, simply rolling his eyes. Wilbur, on the other hand, is having none of it.

"Just because you're blind and deaf--"

"You're the one that wears glasses, Wil," Techno interrupts, satisfied smirk to his lips.

"Projecting, are we?"

Wilbur narrows his eyes at his older brother. "You also wear reading glasses!"

Techno shrugs, unaffected. "I'm just saying, they were good but--"

Wilbur slams upright and lunges for Techno. Phil leans back as Techno ends up wrestling him to the floor with a sigh.

Ranboo and Tubbo whisper bets to each other.

"Boys," Phil groans, lifting a hand to his face. "We have a guest- oh my god."

Tommy laughs and they all look over at the sound. Suddenly, as if spurred on by Tommy's joy, Wilbur goes all out in a dramatic fight. He pulls and bites and Techno has the most exasperated expression on his face as he bats away his brother's hands and face.

Tommy has never playfully fought someone before but he used to spar with his brothers. George would play dirty and Sapnap would get bored quite quickly and Dream simply liked to boast that he was better.

Tommy sits in Tubbo and Ranboo's house, surrounded by their family and doesn't feel panicked or scared.

He feels like he's home.

Theseus stabs a man in Belgium.

The memory is taken from him.

He strangles a woman in Tokyo.

The memory is replaced. Instead, all he remembers is scouting out the woman and then leaving with suitable information. He doesn't remember killing her.

He shoots a politician in Botswana.

The memory is taken from him.

He knows the woman introduced herself, mentioned a name but he can never grasp it. There is just the woman.

Sometimes, he thinks he's one of the lucky ones. He doesn't have to sit in the chair as much as Sapnap and Dream do. He's like George: compliant, calm.

Even then, he knows he's missing things.

There are lessons he learns that he will never remember. There are people he kills that he forgets the faces of. There are hundreds of moments that are stolen or changed.

Sometimes the chair breaks his classmates, leaves them hollow and dazed. Sometimes the chair breaks them so thoroughly, they don't come back to the dorm.

He may be luckier than the others but his main reality is the one where he is Tom and Dream is Clay and the woman is his mother. He knows he is in the Room but sometimes, his memories blur.

Sometimes he doesn't know if there even is a Room.

Las Nevadas is beautiful in the dying light and as Tommy walks closer, snow begins to fall. He leans his head back outside of the side door and smiles up at the sky.

He loves snow and he's missed it.

Pulling himself away from the familiar chill, Tommy enters the building and heads toward Quackity's office. He's been trying for a couple of days but Quackity appears to have disappeared.

Tommy knows it's over Sappnap. Especially with how Chronos has also vanished from the public eye.

Walking the familiar halls, he dodges the staff, already feeling the thrum under his feet of music blaring through speakers. Tommy's glad he's not there. He hates crowds.

The door to Quackity's office is ajar as usual but Tommy can hear voices inside. He slows, making his steps silent and places his back to the wall, listening.

"-couldn't give a shit," Quackity hisses. "My fiancé has been spying on me, for fucks sake, Wilbur. A vigilante kid is the least of my worries."

"He could be sixteen, Q, and you have your hands in the criminal underbelly of this city," Wilbur's voice hits Tommy's ears and he frowns. "Phil thinks we can wait him out but Puffy worries he's already slipped from our grasp. You know what happens if he kills a Hero, you know what happens if he kills the wrong person. They'll come for him - for a possible sixteen year--"

"I don't care," Quackity snaps. "My ears are only interested in finding Nick--"

"They work for the same fucking organisation!" Wilbur shouts and Tommy steps away from the door and loudly approaches.

He swings his head around the door and deepens his frown at how close they are to each other.

"Are you two kissing?" He asks and the tension leaves both of their shoulders at his joke.

Quackity's the first one to pull away, to look to Tommy and smile a disarming smile. "No, Tommy. We weren't. I told you, I'm in a very committed--"

"Blah, blah, blah," Tommy interrupts and then nods to Wilbur. "You shouldn't be so close to him when you're sick."

Quackity's eyes tighten as Wilbur also smiles a disarming smile over to Tommy. "I'm not sick anymore, Tommy. I recovered."

"You're still disgusting and ugly," Tommy replies.

Wilbur rolls his eyes as Quackity snorts. "Everything okay, Tommy?" Quackity asks, changing the subject.

He nods. "You haven't been in the office for a couple of days, wanted to make sure you weren't dead."

Quackity laughs. It's a little strained, a little wobbly but he looks well, his eyes aren't bloodshot and he doesn't look like he hasn't slept.

"I'm just-" Quackity glances at Wilbur, who shakes his head. "Just business being business."

Tommy frowns at him - the lie burning in his ears - and asks, "anything I can help with?"

Quackity shakes his head as Wilbur leans back. "No," he says. "No, but I have heard complaints from Punz that someones been stealing his gold chains?"

Tommy makes the most innocent face he can. "I have no knowledge of that whatsoever."

"Yeah?" Quackity says with a grin. "Is that going to hold up in court-"

A shout sounds, they all turn, Tommy hyper-aware of the gun in his waistband. Quackity moves first, Wilbur trailing behind.

"Stay here," Wilbur says and Tommy goes to ignore the order until he hears that honeyed tone. The one that means he's trying to compel people.

Tommy stills, eyes widening as Wilbur smiles at him. "Wait here and when you see me again, you'll forget what I said," Wilbur says in that same honeyed tone and Tommy stares at him as he leaves. "Sorry, Tommy but this could be dangerous."

Tommy waits, watching as Wilbur follows after Quackity. He counts a minute and then follows after them, moving the gun for easy reach.

He briefly taps into his senses, following the sound of shouts and yells. As he grows closer, slipping through doors on silent feet, the noise only grows in intensity.

He can easily pick out Wilbur's loud voice, honeyed tone firmly in place as he says, "can everyone take a deep breath and calm down?"

The noise is too loud, though and it's clear his voice is being drowned out. Tommy climbs the stairs to be above the main casino, up on the catwalk the security guards stalk.

Below, it's chaos. There are people on the floor, convulsing, medics running between them as the rest of the crowd tries to open the doors, all of which seem to be locked. Tommy immediately has his gun in his hands, eyes surveying the crowd.

Something is very wrong. Punz and Purpled lurk at Quackity's shoulders, trying to pull him back the way he came.

An assassination attempt on Quackity is strange as all the time Tommy has known him, and the time Charlie has spent with him and spoken about, no one has come after Quackity. Mostly because of his indirect ties to the Angel of Death.

A door opens, the people start to flood out leaving only Wilbur, Quackity, Punz and Purpled and the medics dealing with the people on the floor.

That's when Tommy sees her.

A lone woman, stalking through the retreating crowd, eyeliner in a sharp wing, pink lips and pink blush. She has a distracting dress on, mostly to disguise the coldness in her eyes. There's a pistol in her hands as she grabs it from her garter, dropping the dress down.

Tommy is throwing himself from the catwalk before he can blink.

Hitting the ground, he rolls, aims the gun but her attention is now firmly on him. He fires, hitting her shoulder.

She reels back for half a second - Punz grabs Quackity's head and pulls him down - but Black Widows are like Huntsman Spiders. They do not feel pain. They see failure as worse than death.

She turns to where Wilbur is hastily ducking by a card table and aims. Wilbur's eyes widen. Tommy doesn't hesitate to tackle her.

"I thought Widows were subtle," he hisses in Russian, dodging a punch as they kick the guns out of each other's hands.

"I thought Spiders didn't feel," she replies, knife slipping from her sleeve, slashing at him.

He tucks and rolls, kicks at her leg. Unlike the other women who frequent this casino, the Widow is prepared, wearing pretty shoes that are tied up her leg rather than heels. She jumps his kick, looks up to find Wilbur.

Blood pours from her shoulder and Tommy darts to place himself in front of Wilbur, effectively blocking him. He has no weapon, that's across the room, but he cares for the man behind him.

Maybe being his little brother isn't so bad.

He will not let him die today.

"I won't let you kill him," he says and the Widow raises an eyebrow.

She clenches her fist and Punz, who's risen to aim his gun, is pulled back to the wall, hitting it with a thud. He falls limp. Tommy doesn't look, doesn't divert his attention from her.

"Well," she says, voice sweet, "I suppose my mission is complete. I have your attention, don't I, Theseus?"

Tommy stops breathing as Wilbur audibly gasps. "You do...?"

He trails off and she smiles. "Minx," she replies. Names have value, after all, and this a threat, one that tells Tommy he will be seeing her again if he doesn't comply. "You have

forty-eight hours to return or Eret is sending them all.”

He tilts his head. “Widows and Spiders?”

She nods and then looks over his shoulder at Wilbur and then at Quackity. Purpled has carefully made his way over to Punz, sitting by his brother’s side. The medics are working quietly, clearly realising her attention isn’t on them.

“Come home, Theseus, leave the web you’ve made before your people get caught in the silk.”

With that she backs to the door, eyes firmly on him as she picks up her pistol. After slipping the gun back in her garter, she slips out of the door.

Tommy watches her leave and feels bile crawl up his throat, heart sinking.

George and Dream weren’t lying. The Room is active and they want him home- back. They want him back. They want him bad enough they’ll send an army to collect him or put him out of his misery.

And they never told him. Not when they tried to convince Tommy they weren’t a hallucination.

Was that all a lie, a way to deceive him into coming back? Was this of their own will or was it Eret’s commands?

Were they ever his brothers?

“Tommy,” Wilbur whispers and Tommy stills, remembering that Minx and him had an audience. “Why did she call you Theseus?”

“Better question, why was she even here?” Quackity interrupts and Tommy slowly turns, wanting to throw up.

He doesn’t say anything, just stares at Wilbur and Quackity. He knows he’s probably got a heartbroken expression, a shattered one on his face but he can’t school it, doesn’t want to try.

How does he explain without them hating him?

“Tommy.” Wilbur’s voice grows darker, Tommy steels himself. “Are you Theseus?”

Tommy continues to stare. He can’t defend himself and he doesn’t have Wilbur’s abilities to alter their reality. He can’t make them forget this.

His chest aches, burning as he tries to keep his breathing even. He can’t lose it here, not when he runs the risk of somehow alerting Dream or Sapnap or George, not when he doesn’t know if they’re trustworthy.

Is this what pain feels like?

True pain. He thought he understood that through the Room's cruel hand but maybe this is it. Maybe feeling his chest cave in and his lungs tighten and his ribs press hard and unforgiving against his heart is pain.

"Theseus?" Quackity breathes and Tommy instinctively twitches at the name. Both of their eyes harden as Purpled looks up and blinks at Tommy in confusion. "You know- you knew about Nick? You knew this whole time?"

"How long have you known about my family?" Wilbur snarls, standing up as his eyes lose all warmth. Tommy is no longer looking at Wilbur, he's looking at Morningstar.

Tommy can feel tears build in his eyes as he tries to choke them down. "I'm sorry," he whispers in English. "I'm so fucking sorry."

Wilbur's eyes soften before hardening again. Tommy backs away, hands out in a surrender.

"You've been in my home," Wilbur spits. "You pretended to be-"

"I never pretended to be anything," Tommy says, voice hoarse, pleading with the man he considered a substitute brother to understand. "This is me. I'm not- I- I just wanted to be free."

As he looks in their eyes, he knows he's betrayed another family.

A tear slips from his eye. He hastily wipes it away. "I'm sorry," he repeats. "I didn't- I never wanted to hurt you, any of you."

Before they can reply, Tommy sprints away.

Chapter End Notes

So... how we doing???

chuckles nervously I'm in danger

You can come and rant to me on my discord:

[My Discord](#)

Thank you all for your comments, kudos and interactions! I hope you're taking care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

We're back!!!

[My Discord](#)

TW// brief mention of child murder, past brainwashing, past abuse, mention of violence, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil runs his hand through Ranboo's hair, wings flared out behind him. "I would've felt it if someone died, Boo," he tells the boy but Ranboo continues to shake.

"Somethings wrong," he insists, eyes closed.

Niki walks over, holding a cup of tea. She spares Phil a small smile. "Tubbo will be here in a minute, I just- I couldn't leave him like that in my bakery."

"You did the right thing," Phil assures her, shifting to pull Ranboo up so that he can sip the tea. "Feel better?"

Ranboo shakes his head. "Somethings wrong," he reiterates.

"Well," Techno walks in, holding his phone in his hand, eyes wide with panic even as his voice remains calm. "I can't get ahold of Wilbur."

Phil frowns, reaching out and finding nothing wrong with the balance. His son is alive, he's not even injured.

Then, before Phil can panic further, the front door slams open and close and Wilbur stalks in, eyes wide with anger.

"I know who Theseus is," he spits and there's an odd energy to him, chaotic and uncontrolled. "It's fucking Tommy."

Niki's eyes widen as the door opens again, Tubbo blinking up at Wilbur as he flies over to Ranboo. "What's up with Tommy?"

“Theseus,” Wilbur hisses, “the one that shot Phil, Techno and I is Tommy.”

Techno speaks for Phil, “how do you know?”

“Because someone, I’m guessing a Black Widow considering they were talking to each other in Russian, came and poisoned some of Quackity’s customers in Las Nevadas.” Wilbur says, chest rising and falling rapidly. “Tommy or Theseus or whoever the fuck he really is jumped from the fucking catwalk and started fighting her. She called him Theseus.”

For a second, Phil just sits there. Tommy, the boy that his family can’t shut up about. Tommy, the boy that hasn’t watched many TV shows. Tommy, the boy that got overwhelmed when meeting Wilbur’s family.

Tommy, who is Theseus. Theseus, the vigilante who hunts the streets of L’Manberg. Theseus, the Russian who took down the Villains like they were nothing. Theseus, the boy that is a child soldier.

“I told you something was wrong,” Ranboo breathes, moving from Phil’s side to curl up against Tubbo. The boy holds him, antennae pushed back, wings fluttering in concern.

“A kid beat me in a fight?” Techno groans, hand coming to hide his face. “I’m never going to live this down.”

“Is that what you’re focusing on?” Wilbur hisses. “He knew us, Tech! He’s been in our house, he knows our names!”

And that’s when Phil understands. Wilbur isn’t angry at this revelation, he’s terrified of the implications.

Wilbur brought this boy into their lives, into their home, introduced him to his younger brothers. He gave an open invitation to an assassin without even trying to check his background.

“Did the woman say anything like a name?” Niki asks, voice calm.

Wilbur blinks at her, running a hand through his hair. “Uh? I don’t know how that’s-“

“Wil,” Niki says, voice hard. “Did she say a name?”

Phil’s blood runs cold as Niki becomes the woman he saw at the ballet. He doesn’t like to admit he underestimated Niki but he did. He never saw the woman of her past, only the present one she had constructed: the soft woman, the one that likes pastels and plants and baking.

“She said Minx as a singular thing,” Wilbur says and Niki’s eyes widen ever so slightly.

“Did she leave after their fight?”

Wilbur nods and Niki immediately turns to grab her boots. She sits, slipping them on and zipping them up.

Tubbo is the one that asks, “Niki, what are you doing?”

“Going to Tommy’s apartment,” Niki replies, voice short. “He could be in danger.”

“He’s a fucking spy-assassin-kid with a gun, Niki!” Wilbur shouts. “He’s the dangerous one! He’s been lying from day one, saying those things about brothers, making us pity him. I mean, he probably knows about Quackity’s fiancé- god help him when Q tells Karl-“

“What?” Niki freezes in place, eyes narrowed as she looks up at him. “Quackity is telling Karl?”

“Of course he is, we’re dealing with a spy here,” Wilbur says, panting slightly and Niki’s face turns dangerous.

“So not only is he being hunted by a Black Widow, he’s now going to have the Heroes Committee trying to find him?” She asks, voice low and Wilbur blinks.

“I’m sorry,” Wilbur spits, looking to the rest of them, “is everyone in this house going deaf? Are you hearing me? He’s a fucking-“

“So am I!” She screams back, standing suddenly, fists clenched at her sides. The room falls silent as she shudders a breath. Phil’s wings twitch.

“What?” Ranboo is the one to ask, voice quiet as Techno and Wilbur both snap their heads to Phil.

“The ballet,” Techno breathes.

“You weren’t the target,” Wilbur mutters to Phil. “Were you?”

Phil’s wings flex at the accusing stares. “We’re allowed to have lies in this family,” he states, calmly.

“Not when they include a shady program!” Wilbur shouts. “You’re my dad! You’re our dad, you’re supposed to tell us-“

And there it is again, that fear. Phil wishes to comfort his son, remind him that killing any of them would be near impossible considering his power and even then, if they were to fall, he would simply bring them back.

Niki beats him to it.

“They make you kill at five,” Niki states, voice cold as they all look at her. “They say it’s about loyalty but even then, we knew it was life or death. Then it’s what we called the chair. They hook you up to electrodes and burn the memories out of you, rewriting them, destroying them, editing them until all you know is the Red Room, all you know is them.”

She looks down and then back up, eyes dark and fiery. “I thought for years that I was training to be a ballerina, that I was working with the Bolshoi. Instead, I was killing people. I was five, Wil. Five. Do you know who else started at five? Tommy did.”

The silence is palpable. Phil feels just as shocked as everyone else. Niki only told him the basics, she only mentioned that she used to work for a program.

She never mentioned this.

Techno has his eyes to the floor, Wilbur's eyes are wide. Tubbo and Ranboo are clutching each other like a lifeline. Phil's wings twitch under the tension.

Niki stands alone, unfazed and unapologetic. She is something different here, in this light. She is not nice or sweet or soft. Here, Phil can see the assassin lurking under her skin, can see the predator in her eyes.

Here, she is a Black Widow.

"I'm going to his apartment," she says, slowly, "to make sure he wasn't followed because he's probably panicking, which means he's likely to miss something. I don't care if you follow me, I don't care what you do so long as you don't get in my way."

She finishes zipping up her boot and turns for the door.

Tubbo clears his throat, calls out to her retreating figure, "you mean- is that why he doesn't know about TV shows?"

Niki pauses, looks over at Tubbo, eyes softening. "The only shows we saw were the old Disney films. We would sit for hours in hard chairs with straight backs, repeating the same dialogue over and over until we lost our Russian accent."

"You can fight as well as he can?" Techno asks and she smiles at him, a sharp wolf's grin.

"We were trained the same," she replies. Techno raises his eyebrows and her smile becomes more genuine.

"And they're coming for him?" Phil asks her. "The same way they tried to kill you at the ballet?"

She nods and lets out a hollow laugh. "Minx was the one at the ballet, too, so I suppose it's just for her to be hunting Tommy."

"But they left you alone," Ranboo says, voice strained. "Why are they after Tommy like this?"

"It could be his abilities, it could be because he took down more of their facility than they can handle..." Niki trails off, shrugs. "Either way, Tommy is important enough to them to try and get him back. I'm not letting them hurt him. I'm not letting him die."

Tubbo and Ranboo look to each other and then Tubbo is fluttering off the couch, pulling Ranboo up. "Neither are we."

"You can't- if they're there-" Niki tries and Techno rolls his shoulders, cracks his neck.

“I’m dying for a fight,” he says, smiles at Niki with his bloodthirsty grin. “What am I going to need?”

They all then look to Wilbur, who’s staring at his shoes, clearly conflicted. It makes sense, Wilbur was the one closest to Tommy.

After a moment he looks up, eyes determined. “Tommy’s apartment? Where even is that?”

Niki smiles as Phil stands, wings unfurling. “I followed him once, I know where it is. You need to be geared up and be prepared to possibly fight children.”

“Niki,” Techno drawls, “you know how much I love stabbing orphans.”

“Technoblade,” Phil sighs as Wilbur walks away to grab their gear.

Niki shifts on her feet, clearly impatient but Phil doesn’t worry. They’ll face this as a family, as a unified force.

They’ll save Tommy because he may be Theseus, he may have shot Phil multiple times but Tommy is a teenager. He’s a teenager that was trained to kill and has somehow managed to survive this long without any outside help.

Phil is prepared to show Tommy that he doesn’t have to face the world, or carry its weight on his shoulders, alone anymore.

It becomes apparent very quickly what one of Theseus’ abilities is when he meets Eret.

The first time - the day he shot and killed the random person as instructed - he meets Eret, he doesn’t feel the pull.

The second they met, when Eret is standing in their dorm, asking them to come up and kiss the ring, Theseus doesn’t feel as compelled as his other classmates do.

The third, the fourth, the fifth: the numbers become irrelevant. Theseus does not feel pulled to Eret, he doesn’t particularly feel anything for the man at all.

He does as instructed because he is instructed to do so and he will live, he will survive at any and all costs.

Theseus originally believes Eret is powerless, like himself, until the woman explains, “Eret manipulates emotional ties. It means you cannot harm them, you want to please them, be near them.”

It’s only then do they realise Theseus isn’t affected.

It's only then that Theseus has lessons away from his class where he sits in the chair and holds a weapon. An image of Eret is displayed in short bursts and electricity races through Theseus until the thought of killing or harming the man is impossible.

Theseus may not be able to harm or kill Eret like his other classmates but he isn't pulled into that faux loyalty like the others.

So when he graduates, Theseus has no ties stopping him from littering the base with Semtex.

There is a memory that drifts closer and closer to his grasp. He watches it, making no move to stop it.

It's been rewritten so many times, it's a frayed thing but he has hope. He needs to understand and quickly.

He remembers the mission clearly. He arrived in L'Manberg, stalked into a house and shot the young girl first. He then climbed the stairs and shot the late teens, early twenties man at his desk before stalking his way to the other bedroom and shooting the woman with the kind eyes.

He remembers George waiting outside, pulling him back towards the Room.

Yet, through Tommy's power, he saw the woman standing there, unharmed and alive. Which means he didn't kill her. The possibility of him killing her family is also quite low.

The more he thinks about it, the more it leads him to that memory that tries to get through. It may not tell him what happened but he does remember an address.

Dream leaves in the middle of the night, telling the guards he's searching for more recruits. They don't stop him, it's not like they can: this has been his task for awhile now.

Dream leaves the facility, drives out and jumps on a plane. Ukraine is warm when he arrives, but Dream still pulls his coat tighter as he keeps his head down.

He picks up a rental car and drives to the address he's memorised from the memory.

The house sits atop a hill, fields spanning either side of it. Dream drives up and steps out, grabbing the gun from his holster and looking around.

It quiet but not unnaturally so. He's still cautious as he walks to the back door, finds it unlocked.

The house is a classic safe house, with a lever in the centre that once pulled, allows metal sheets to drop across the windows and doors. There's cans in the cupboards and water in the tap.

There is no one waiting for him.

Dream scouts the house and finds nothing out of place. Most of the surfaces are covered in a thin layer of dust.

There, at the front door, however, is an envelope.

He delicately picks it up, inspects it and then places his gun in his holster, flicking out his knife. He cuts into the envelope and pulls out a single piece of paper with a Polaroid attached.

The photo has a younger version of himself standing in it, next to a man and a woman.

The piece of paper reads:

Cal will know when you've got this so meet in Rome, on the corner.

Be safe.

Dream stares at the piece of paper and then at the photo. The names hit him after a moment of staring: Callahan and Alyssa.

He blinks, swallows and leaves with the photo and the piece of paper in his pocket.

Four hours later, he's standing in the sun of Rome.

Dream doesn't know what he's doing. He simply walks, letting muscle memory fill in for his lost memory.

He ends up in a quaint cafe, orders himself an espresso and waits. He settles in for a long wait, leaning back, eyes scanning the road and the people constantly but it seems he doesn't have to wait for long.

A woman exits a car, a man beside her. She has long, blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a black hoodie and shorts. Beside her, the man has fluffy brown hair and golden eyes. Antlers appear to be growing from his skull.

They sit opposite Dream, both smiling at him.

"We've met before," the woman says. "I'm Alyssa, this is Callahan."

Callahan moves his hands, begins to sign in American Sign Language: *Hello again, Dream.*

"Hello," Dream replies and then signs back: *Would it be easier if I signed?*

All of the Room's recruits learn sign language. Not to help anyone within the facility - any physical impairment amongst the children leads to a quick culling as they're seen as weaker - but to help in missions.

Callahan smiles wider at him as Alyssa says, "Callahan can lip read and sense where anyone on the planet is. I can read minds."

At that Dream stills, trying to put blocks up in his mind, rising, solid structures that are impenetrable. They're taught how to resist mental manipulation but with the way Alyssa rolls her eyes, it's clearly not foolproof.

"Dream," she says, slowly, "we met in L'Manberg where I broke through the mental blocks of what you called the chair after you were sent to kill me and capture a girl I was babysitting at the time. You ended up fighting a Hero dubbed the Captain, where you realised something: you were related. During your stay, we spoke multiple times and you even told me to contact you through your safe house in Ukraine. We lost contact after a couple of weeks. Callahan explained that he saw you back in Russia."

Dream blinks at her. "I don't understand. Why would- I don't remember any of that."

"Your mind is blocked again," she says, eyes staring intensely at him, as though looking through to his soul. "You mentioned something about being wiped, your memories being rewritten."

Dream nods, feeling calm in their presence. He can't exactly fight someone who can read his mind but it's not just that: he can hear the truth there. He knows she's not lying to him.

"So why contact me again?" He asks and this time she looks to Callahan.

He begins to sign: *Before you disappeared, you told us that the only way you'd be free is to kill someone you called the woman.*

Dream tilts his head. "And get through Eret's ability. Killing her would only stop the program, Eret can keep us loyal."

"And yet, you aren't, are you?" Alyssa murmurs. She reaches over and takes his espresso, sipping it. "Do you know why?"

"You," he replies because that's the only answer that makes sense.

She smiles, grabs something in her pocket and throws it at him. He snatches a hand out to catch it, finds that it's vials of red liquid.

"Synthesised from my blood," she says. "An old friend helped me out when I mentioned it. Smash them or drink them: they will break your bonds to Eret."

"They work?" He asks, dubiously and Callahan grins at him.

He signs: *Do you know Connor?*

Dream nods and Alyssa continues, "your organisation doesn't like me meddling ever since they failed at hunting me down. They sent him to kill me. Callahan was home instead, broke one of these. He said it's like waking up. He did leave, though, I wonder where he went."

Dream blinks. “He was target practice,” he whispers and they blanch at him. “He came back and tried to kill Eret. I watched him get shot in the courtyard.”

“Oh,” Alyssa whispers, placing the cup back on the table. She swallows then clears her throat. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you,” Dream says, even if he does not mourn the man. “As for a way to kill the woman?”

“Find Kristin,” Alyssa replies, face still pale. “The Angel of Death in L’Manberg knows her. She’s the only one that can stop the woman.”

”And you know this how?” He asks and she tilts her head.

“I found out that the woman you talk about is Creation. Well, Creation has a sister, Death.” Alyssa looks at him with a sad smile. “In a way, the lies she told you had some truth: you were created to destroy but not the world, just her. Death is the only one with the power to stop Creation.”

Dream wants to shout that she’s lying, that none of it makes sense but he remembers his graduation ceremony. He remembers the way it felt like he was dying and being reborn. He remembers the woman’s discussion about her own life.

He’s not George, the skeptic. Even if this plan is utterly ludicrous, he has to start somewhere.

He wants to be free.

Dream nods, stuffing the vials in his pocket. “Thank you for the information,” he says, goes to rise when Callahan grabs his sleeve.

“I have the gift of prophecy as well as the gift of the mind,” Alyssa tells him. “When you meet the Angel, you are with a boy that looks like you. That is the only way the Angel will talk to you.”

“Theseus- or I suppose, it’s Tommy now,” Dream breathes. “He’s in L’Manberg.”

Callahan shakes his head and signs: *No, he’s not. He’s currently somewhere over Switzerland. I think he’s flying.*

Dream pauses, stares at him. “What?”

“Is he flying back to Russia?” Alyssa asks him and Dream shakes his head.

“He’s too smart to be coming back. What else is there-“ Dream freezes and Alyssa smiles at the memory she sees.

Dream, showing Tommy a safe house, one of many. Teaching him to always find a spare in as many countries as he could, to always be prepared.

“Budapest is lovely this time of year,” she says and he smiles.

“It seems I need to pay my little brother a visit,” he says, standing. He looks at them and quietly adds, “thank you for helping me- helping us. I- I don’t suppose you-“

She shakes her head, eyes sad. “I can remove Eret’s control but I can’t give you your memories back, I’m sorry.”

He looks down and nods. “Thank you anyway. Both of you.”

They both give him smiles as he turns and walks away, a plan forming in his head.

First, he needs to grab George and Sapnap. Second, they need to head to Budapest to speak to Tommy. Then, they need to find Kristin, kill the woman, kill Eret and break the rest of the recruits out of their mental cages.

He shrugs, smug smile to his lips. It should be easy. Just a normal days work for a Huntsman Spider of the Red Room.

Chapter End Notes

And we get plot ;)

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions!! Y’all better be taking care of yourselves <3

Also the discord link if it won’t work ;) :
<https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

I'm back!!

TW// mention of child death, mention of a lot of death, injury mention, scar mention, past brainwashing, past abuse, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Theseus' mission is falling apart in his very hands.

First, the house has guards watching it and while this is normally rather pointless in the grand scheme of things - Theseus will get in at some point - they're actually good at their jobs and he's on a time crunch.

Second, there is only supposed to be a couple. It is supposed to be easy. Normally, marks follow a regular pattern and he knows when to strike. It should be easy yet for some reason, they're the most unpredictable people on the planet.

Third, there is a little boy staring at him in the hallway. He is six, maybe seven. Theseus has this little boy's parent's blood under his fingernails.

"Are you daddy's friend?" The boy asks and Theseus swallows. He is a Huntsman, he does not feel, he does not waver.

"Yes." He says, crouches down. "What's your name?"

"Misha," the boy replies. "I'm hungry."

Theseus smiles at the boy, offers his hand, knowing the child cannot see his nails in this dark light.

"Let's go get you a snack then," he says and takes the boy downstairs, helps him have a biscuit and a cup of warm milk.

The mission was clear: no survivors.

When he arrives back, he is the one insisting a need to be wiped. The woman allows him through.

Theseus remembers a mission involving a couple. He does not remember anything about a boy.

Budapest is warm, Tommy finds. Warm but with a chill in the air. His senses are going haywire, everything making him twitch and wince, prepared to be jumped, prepared to be attacked.

The Room are after him and Wilbur knows, which means the rest of them know too. So Tommy is being hunted by the Room and by the Angel of Death, probably the Heroes considering Quackity was there with Wilbur and Karl is Chronos.

Tommy did what he was trained to do: he ran to his web for safety.

It's why he's in Budapest, one of the safe houses Dream has scattered across the globe. He knows George has more but Sapnap mostly uses theirs.

Tommy settles in, smiling at the bullet holes in the walls. He sleeps there, eating basic meals from the cans in the cupboards.

He's kitted out, thankful for the mini-armoury in the floorboards. His plans are flimsy things but he has to plan to live, he has to keep moving. A spider in a web will always be caught before the one on the prowl.

Russia is off limits and he'd rather not head near Belarus. He could go to England, or maybe Scotland to be away from people.

He has a distant memory of a house in the countryside, snow falling so heavily he's reminded of Russia. That could be good although he doesn't know whether to move on foot. It's easier to travel without restrictions through Europe.

The hair on the back of Tommy's neck rises. He pauses from where he's been sharpening his knife. Slipping it up his sleeve, he moves to the window, gun firmly in his grasp.

From the outside, nothing seems off. There are people walking around, a woman watering her plants on the balcony.

The birds are quiet, though.

Tommy slips into an adjacent room, pulls the cupboard door to the side and ducks into a room which holds the screens to the security cameras.

Tommy's breath catches at the sight.

There, on the fifth screen depicting the activity near the main door, Dream stands. His signature green hoodie has been replaced by a less eye-catching green t-shirt, mostly hidden by a jacket. He's wearing black jeans and thick, heavy set boots.

Tommy immediately looks to the other cameras and there, across the street in the background of camera three, there's movement on the roof.

George.

Tommy swallows, noting no sight of a third party on any of the cameras. He leaves the room, senses stretched thin as he looks out of the windows. At first, nothing catches his eye but then, as he studies a car parked outside, dark windows obscuring the view, he takes note of the way it's parked, in clear view of the building, quick for a getaway, a sunroof for possible access with a sniper rifle.

Sapnap.

Tommy moves away from the windows, keeping himself in the dining room. He evens his breathing and waits.

A spider in the centre of it's web, waiting for a fly to tug at the silk.

And there, pulling him near the door, is a tug that's all Dream.

"I know you're out there," Tommy calls, fingers flexing on the gun.

"I know you know I'm out here," Dream shouts back after slight hesitation.

An English boy and an American man meet in a Budapest apartment.

"So, are we gonna talk like grownups?" Dream asks as he appears from around the door, gun raised.

"Is that what we are?" Tommy replies, raising his own gun. Mirror images of each other.

Two Huntsman Spiders from the Red Room meet in a safe house.

Dream steps closer, Tommy doesn't move, eyes watching his every breath, every step. He's so close, Tommy drinks in the sight of him. Blond hair, green eyes, the scar Tommy gave him.

He's real, not a hallucination, not an image Tommy's ability manufactured.

Tommy doesn't know if he's triggered or not, if Dream is here to kill him or bring him back to Russia. All Tommy knows is George and Sapnap are waiting and that Dream has a gun to Tommy's face.

Dream steps closer. Their guns are nearly touching.

Then, in movements synchronised, they lunge for the other's gun until their roles are reversed.

Tommy's lips quirk, Dream smirks.

"You're getting sloppy," Dream says. "The first rule--"

“Shoot first.” Tommy responds and then throws himself at Dream.

Their guns get kicked from hands, punches dodged and jabs caught. Tommy swipes Dream’s legs out from under him. He falls, darts a hand out to tug Tommy to the ground.

There’s a jab to his ribs, an arm around his throat. Tommy drops his foot down on Dream’s crotch, slipping from his arms when Dream instinctively releases him.

He’s barely able to roll away before Dream is up, knife in his hand. Tommy flips the one out from his sleeve, and darts up.

They both catch each other’s arms, knives held over each other’s faces. There was a time when Dream was taller than Tommy. Now they’re the same height.

Tommy let’s Dream’s arm go, flinches back from the blade and swipes at Dream’s stomach. Dream pushes him into the door and he ducks to avoid a knife to the back.

His head collides with the wood, ears ringing. The knife gets wedged into the door frame and Tommy uses that advantage to kick at Dream’s hand. He catches his leg, pulls Tommy towards him, slapping the knife from Tommy’s hand.

They end up back on the floor, taking the available chance to punch and jab at one another. Most of the blows are blocked but Tommy clips Dream’s jaw, jabs him in the ribs; Dream ends up hitting Tommy’s chin, pulling his hair.

It’s a blur of movement, of pure instincts and quick bursts of pain. Tommy barely blinks at it, to focused on gaining the upper hand.

There, on the floor, his gun sits. Tommy makes the quick decision to push off of Dream, kicking him in the stomach as he propels himself backwards, hands searching the wooden floor for the weapon.

Once in his grip, he flips over, only to come face to face to Dream kneeling on one knee, gun pointed straight at Tommy.

“Truce?” Dream asks in Russian.

Tommy tilts his head. “Eret didn’t trigger you?”

“We got out.” Dream replies with a shrug. “I told you I had a plan.”

Tommy snorts and puts the gun away. Dream follows suit, rising to shift the gun back in his shoulder holster.

“Dream,” Tommy says, voice hard. He has to know because he allows himself to care for the man before him. “Did you know about the Widow?”

Dream raises his eyebrows, pulling his scar taut. “Widow?”

“She tried to kill my friend and now they know about me.”

Dream's eyes harden. "Eret doesn't trust us with information anymore. Is your friend-?"

Tommy shrugs, looks down. Dream sighs, makes his way to a window and opens the curtains, making a thumbs up sign before turning back to Tommy.

"So George is on the left roof and Sapnap's in the car across the street," Tommy says. "Who else did you bring?"

"Just them," Dream replies but his shoulders don't relax. "George has a hunch Eret is sending people to follow us though."

Tommy nods and then frowns at him. "How did you even know--"

"Met an old friend," Dream replies, walking past him to the kitchen, grabbing two glasses. "Two actually. They told me how to stop the Room and where to find you."

"You can't," Tommy says as Dream runs the taps, begins to fill up the glasses with water. "I've tried, I've met- I tried. How many more have tried and failed?"

Tommy will wait until he mentions Niki. Just for now.

"You blew up the building," Dream reminds him, passing him a glass. "You never killed Eret or the woman."

"No one can kill Eret," Tommy hits back, sipping the water, leaning back. "As for the woman, I didn't think she could fucking die."

The hair on the back of his neck rises and Tommy turns his head as the door clicks open.

"She can," Dream says, confidently. "And if she can't- well, we're all going to die anyway so..."

George slips around the corner, guitar case thrown over his shoulder, Sapnap following behind. George has his glasses on, Sapnap has bandana holding his black hair back.

"Theseus," George greets and dodges the elbow to the ribs Sapnap tries to inflict.

"Dream said it's Tommy, now," Sapnap says and then looks to Tommy.

Both of them scan him over and Tommy has the urge to throw himself forward. Sapnap seems to sense this because a smile pulls at his lips. He holds out his arm.

"Come here," he breathes and Tommy drops the glass to the counter, walking forward so that Sapnap can curl an arm around his shoudler. "Hello, little brother."

"I've missed you," Tommy whispers and Sapnap's arm tightens around him.

"Missed you, too, man," he replies. "Plus, after you left, the food at the other Room fucking sucked."

George snorts and then Tommy feels a hand in his hair. "It's good to see you alive, Tommy."

Tommy tilts his head to look at George. "No hug?"

George frowns at him. "Since when did-"

Tommy pushes Sapnap away to quickly wrap his arms around George's shoulders. The man huffs, patting him on the back before pushing him gently away.

"C'mon now," Dream says. "I get a glock to my face and these idiots get hugs?"

Tommy looks over at Dream. "You're just upset I get to hold Gogy."

Dream grins at him. "I mean-"

"Dream," George hisses, pushing Tommy further away.

Dream shrugs, grabbing Tommy's shoulder to pull him closer, ruffling his hair. "What? No one's watching anymore and it's not like our punishment will be any more severe."

Tommy tucks his head into Dream's neck, feeling his arms curl around him. It's a bit stilted, a bit strained: none of them really know how to be comforting.

But here's the thing: Tommy has longed for this affection, this attention. He's used to the one-sided brief hugs, the hair ruffles, the hand holds and squeezes.

Dream is right, they've already defected, they're already traitors. It's not like Eret is going to care if they hold one another compared with that.

After another moment, Tommy pulls away and says, "whatever you plan entails, we need to keep moving."

"The Widows and Spiders will be on their way now," George agrees but Tommy shakes his head.

"Uh, I- I may have pissed off the Angel of Death's son." He then looks up to Sapnap.

"Quackity also found out about me so he's probably informed Karl and the other Heroes."

"Your fiancés?" Dream asks and Sapnap nods, rubbing a hand across the back of his neck.

"They know about me now, so I guess the weddings off."

George rolls his eyes. "We can deal with finding you a partner or two after we survive the new recruits, the older Widows and Spiders, Eret, the woman, Tommy's L'Manberg friends who are Villains - how, Tommy? Just how? - and the Heroes."

Dream laughs, Tommy glares at him. "Stop being so fucking negative."

"We are so going to die." Sapnap mumbles and then narrows his eyes at all of them. "I'm getting married."

“Okay?” They all reply in unison in the same tone and Sapnap rolls his eyes.

“I’m not dying,” he says, voice firm. “I refuse to let them take everything from me, especially when I fought so hard to keep my life. So I want you to know: I’m getting married. Fuck them.”

George and Dream share a look. “I’d like to not hide anymore,” Dream breathes.

Slowly, as if preparing for rejection, Dream reaches for George, hand slipping into his. After a moment’s hesitation, George links their fingers together.

“I’d like that to,” George replies, quietly and turns to Tommy. “What about you?”

Tommy shrugs. “I think they hate me back in L’Manberg but I- I want that. I want what we had to be real. I want brothers again.”

They all give him identical soft looks. “It was real to me, too,” Dream replies.

“Also I’m not above punching the shit out of whoever’s upset with you,” Sapnap tells him and Tommy laughs.

George taps his guitar case, face both serious and joking. “You say the word and they’re gone.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “Being away from you fuckers has reminded me how utterly psychotic you all are.”

“Thank you,” they all reply, sharp grins to their lips and Tommy rolls his eyes, somehow comforted by the sight of them.

It doesn’t hurt as much knowing that the people from L’Manberg probably hate him, are probably out to kill him. He’s with his brothers, his mind eases at that.

He doesn’t have to be so prepared anymore, so on edge. They’ll be there for him, look after him like they used to in the Room.

But something is tugging him back to L’Manberg.

He already misses Niki and her easy attitude. He misses Wilbur smiling at him and Quackity’s laugh and Tubbo and Ranboo’s entire dynamic.

He misses Phil - their conversations ringing in his mind - and he misses Punz and Purpled, he misses Techno and he misses Charlie.

Despite everything, he’s made friends. He began to see Wilbur as his older brother. He began to care-

The thought makes his eyes widen.

Tommy cares about them. He wants them to be safe, he wants them to be happy, he wants them to be alive.

He allowed himself to enjoy a friendship. He grew complacent and look where that's led him.

"What is it?" George asks and Tommy snaps out his daze, realising they've all tensed because they think Tommy's sensed something.

"Nothing," he says, shaking his head. "I- it doesn't matter."

"Little spider," Dream breathes and Tommy shudders but still rolls his eyes.

"You know," he says to Dream, "I didn't realise that was a trigger until I got out. It's why I always followed you, isn't it?"

Dream has the decency to look abashed. "Even when you grew stronger, you weren't the best. You were loud and abrasive--"

"So aggressive," Sapnap mutters.

"Coming from you," George hits back, dodging a swing from Sapnap.

"- I couldn't have you dying on me," Dream continues. "I'm- it was wrong of me to do it--"

"Dream," Tommy interrupts, gently punching his shoulder. "I'm not pissed at you. I get it- it was sick and twisted and so fucking shitty but you did save my life. All of you did. I'm never going to be pissed at you for that."

Tommy looks up, meets all of their eyes. These are his brothers, for better or worse, and he wouldn't change that for the world.

Not even if he misses Wilbur's encouraging talks and Tubbo's buzzing laugh and Ranboo's dry comments. He's definitely not thinking about Phil trying to help him and Trigger helping him understand things and Quackity's way of understanding when Tommy needed to be distracted.

"You're my family," he says, lightly, quietly, as if still fearing the weight of his words, as if waiting for the punishment to follow. "I know spiders aren't really sociable creatures but then, I'm not a spider anymore am I?"

"We can feel," Sapnap replies in the same tone. "We're human now."

"We will be," George says, releasing Dream's hand to pat Tommy's shoulder. "I can't promise anything but I can promise that you will live through this."

A low noise leaves Tommy's throat as Dream ruffles his hair. His back aches.

He opens his mouth, prepared to thank them when a tugging sensation fills him, the hair on the back of his neck rising. He stills, snapping his head in the direction of the feeling and all three of them follow suit.

He holds up three fingers, nodding to the door. Then holds two and looks above him.

Dream points to the window leading to the balcony. Tommy nods and they begin to shuffle over there on silent feet. George unzips his guitar case, begins to assemble his rifle with quick and nimble fingers.

That's when hell breaks loose.

There is a shapeshifter Theseus has been instructed to hunt down. It's difficult when the person can change shape so quickly and so often.

The shapeshifter is a woman in Scotland and then a fox. Then a man in Belfast. Then a crow, a husky, a tabby cat.

Theseus kills the shapeshifter in Dublin.

When he returns, the memory is taken from him yet that night, his bones ache as he lies in his bed.

There is a woman in Bulgaria. Theseus stabs her. The memory is taken from him when returns.

Yet for days after, lights flicker at his presence and when he sits in the chair two weeks later, the entire facility suffers a power cut.

There is a man in South Africa. Theseus shoots him in the skull. The memory is taken from him when he returns.

Yet sometimes he swears he can hear the birds discussing what worm to have for their breakfast.

Then, on a mission, when he's swimming, a shark circles around him but instead of hunting, it practically leads Theseus back to the shore.

Months pass and he forgets these incidents.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy's powers amiright? Also DreamTeam are here and ready to cause chaos!!

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions! Take care of yourselves! <3

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Yo lads!

So, because of health reasons, I won't be uploading for a week. Rest assured, next Wednesday a chapter will be posted (or this will be updated to say if I need longer) but I'd like to say: this fic is fuelling me so even if it takes a while, I will be returning. Don't fear.

I should be still answering comments and talking on my discord if you want to come and rant so thank you for your support ;)

TW// mention of forced sterilisation, past abuse, past brainwashing, violence, threats of death, injury and blood, people dying, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The ceiling explodes at the same time the door slams open, red lasers shining through. Sapnap pulls out his gun and immediately starts shooting as Dream throws the window open, pulling Tommy out.

They're met with more people, some young, some old and one noticeable figure.

Tommy feels the grin tug at his lips even as he's panicking. "Hi, Minx!" He shouts as they fire. "Thought I had forty-eight hours!"

"I'm here for the others but your time is almost up!" She calls back as they climb up the side of the building to the roof. "Let's do this the nice way, Theseus!"

"Actually," Dream yells down, "let's do this my way."

His fist clenches as the ground beneath the Widow's feet shifts, opens up. She falls through the pavement as Tommy races after Dream on the roof. George is close behind as fire erupts from the safe house, Sapnap grinning as he hurtles after him.

Over the roof, they slide down to the other side.

"Tommy?" George calls and Tommy knows exactly what he's after, years of training and missions together proving their worth.

"Two below, one following." He shouts back.

George briefly pauses, swings his rifle around and fires twice before rising. Tommy immediately feels the tugging sensation stop and rolls his eyes.

“How did you know?” He shouts as Dream flicks his wrist, bricks ripping from the wall to create a staircase down.

“I’m the-“ George tries to say but Sapnap is quick to interrupt him.

“If you say the oldest, I swear to god.”

A Widow drops from above and Sapnap is quick to grab her, flip her around and cut at her throat. Tommy doesn’t look back, just keeps running.

Until Dream freezes at the sight of someone sitting on the hood of the car.

“Corpse,” Dream greets, faux cheer in his tone. “Don’t make me shoot you in broad daylight.”

The man chuckles, voice so low Tommy is mildly jealous. “That wouldn’t be very nice,” he says, standing.

Unlike the other Spiders and Widows who have to look presentable, who have names issued by the Room, Corpse is the odd one out for both. Burns litter the side of his face and down his neck, which is why he’s rarely out in public. Corpse is also a name given to him by the government, not the room, because out of all the Huntsman Spiders, he has the largest kill count.

George aims the rifle straight at him, the citizens too focused on the burning apartment than them. Sapnap has shifted to block Tommy from view.

“Eret has been very specific on their instructions,” Corpse says, nodding to Tommy, hands in his hoodie pockets looking unbothered by the gun in his face. “I’ve never seen them so worried before.”

“Get to the point,” Dream hisses and Corpse slides to the side, allowing them access to the car.

“I owe you one,” Corpse comments to Dream. “For Brazil.”

“And the others?” George asks and Corpse shrugs, dark eyes leaving their faces to scan their surroundings.

“I’m meeting Rae in fifteen minutes,” he says. “The others should be there, too. After that...”

“We can work with fifteen minutes,” Sapnap replies, cracking his neck.

Corpse rolls his eyes but there’s a smile to his lips. Tommy has barely spoken to Corpse before he abandoned the Room but he knows that the others have interacted with their fellow Spiders and Widows on the regular.

“Corpse,” he says as Dream gets into the driver’s side, George slipping into the back as Sapnap hovers by the passenger side, watching Tommy.

The man turns. “Yes?”

“I don’t want to kill you,” he says, voice calm, “but you know what happens if I do.”

Corpse has the ability to possess people, influencing them without them knowing. One touch and they’re inadvertently under his control. It’s why he’s sent on many hushed up missions: he can always make them look like suicides.

Corpse regards him carefully. “There’s a reason Rae and Sykkuno aren’t here.”

Tommy nods. “Thank you.”

Corpse rolls his eyes. “If you’re able to pull this off - and I mean, take the entire Room down - I’ll be the one thanking you.”

With that, he pulls the hood over his head and stalks away. Tommy slips into the car, Sapnap following.

The car is silent before George asks, “is that your plan, kill them and- well, you know?”

Tommy shrugs, looks out of the window. “I don’t want to but if it comes to it, then I’ll do what I have to.”

George hums. “Then I suggest picking out Brooke.”

“Luck?” Dream snorts and George rolls his eyes.

“We need that more than anything else.”

“I’ll focus on Jack and Corpse,” Sapnap says. “Dream, you’ve got Tina.”

“And Sykkuno.” Dream mutters, turning down a side road. “George, you can handle Leslie and Toast.”

“I guess that means I’ve got Minx and Rae.” Tommy says with a frown. “You’re all fucking mean.”

George turns his head. “Have you forgotten that you’re immune to their abilities?”

Tommy pouts, widening his eyes. “Gogy, don’t be fucking mean to me.”

Sapnap snorts as Dream laughs. “Tommy, have you-“

The hair on the back of his neck rises just as a force collides with the car, flipping it.

In the Room, the recruits must be unmade. They are stripped of any life they possibly had before - some recruits are born into the Room as some older agents are not sterilised - and wiped, their minds only knowing the walls of the Room.

They are stripped of their identity, reminded that they will only be a number, a mere speck of dust when compared with the larger web.

There are things that each recruit hides, though. Secret relationships, secret ties, secret lies.

Theseus doesn't try to hide anything, he mostly tries to ignore it. One of his abilities is extremely helpful, the other is more of a hindrance.

He knows he could be a star recruit, knows there's a reason he's sent after the people with powerful abilities for a reason.

Most of the time, he doesn't notice.

Most of the time, it's easy to ignore.

But it's the small things that linger with him. The way the Earth talks to him, the way his bones will ache when he runs like he's not in the right shape, the way his mind screams to be near Dream and George and Sapnap.

Theseus isn't weak, though. He pushes down those thoughts and feelings and instincts.

Unlike his classmates, he does not fail.

He learns to weaponise his ability, learns how to utilise it.

His back aches but he is not like the boy he shot down.

Theseus survives.

The Heroes Committee resides in a skyscraper in L'Manberg's main business district. The building rises into the sky, touching the clouds and normally, Puffy likes being up here. It makes it easier to breathe and Puffy doesn't feel like she's suffocating.

Especially when she's with her children. Drista and her reality warping and Foolish's ability to control the sea and sky.

And also her son, his face from the only photo she has of him, hours old, on her desk. The son she didn't even have the ability to name before he was stolen from her.

Puffy drags her gaze away from the picture as the noise inside the conference room rises.

"Stop," she commands and instantly, multiple sets of eyes are flicking to her's. "Thank you. One at a time please, I'm getting a headache. Who is Theseus?"

“Tommy,” Quackity hisses. “The kid that’s been working for me. He said he’s eighteen and had documents but I’m guessing he’s sixteen at a push. Blond, blue eyes.”

“He’s a Huntsman Spider, from the Red Room,” Karl says, gesturing to the pieces of paper littered before everyone, the same documents Phil handed out after Tubbo hacked into the Russian government. “It’s the same program as- as Nick-“

Karl chokes, looks down and Quackity grips his hand tighter, glaring out at the Heroes with burning eyes. “We need to find him so that we can find Nick.”

“He’s sixteen?” Sam whispers, yellow eyes wide.

“Wait,” Foolish looks up, gold hair falling into face. “The Syndicate are getting bested by a kid?”

Drista snorts. “You say that like I don’t beat you at everything.”

Puffy leans over to push her feet from the desk and rolls her eyes when Drista pouts at her.

“I will drop you in the ocean,” Foolish threatens in a cheery tone.

Fundy looks at Quackity, interrupting the squabbling from Puffy’s children. “Tommy? As in, Tommy who was surprised at ice cream flavours?”

Quackity nods, mostly focused on Karl, who sits with bloodshot eyes. Fundy frowns, fox ears twitching atop his head.

“So what’s the plan?” Bad asks as Skeppy throws and catches a ball, over and over, not looking interested whatsoever. “Find this muffin and bring him in for questioning?”

“He’s sixteen,” Puffy reminds them. “I think we should approach the situation as lightly as possible. I think-“

“He bested the Villains as Foolish said, at sixteen,” Ant says, leaning back in his chair. “Doesn’t that mean he’s extremely dangerous?”

Drista scoffs, blowing blonde hair from her face. “Worried, catboy?”

“Isn’t it past your bedtime?” Fundy retorts and Drista grins at him.

“Sorry, I don’t understand furry.”

Foolish giggles, Skeppy chokes on his water and Bad simply looks up at the ceiling, clearly asking telepathically for mercy.

“He is dangerous,” Karl agrees, speaking up and everyone instantly looks at him. “But he’s still a kid.”

“Nick was spying on us,” Quackity says, voice strained. “Who’s to say Tommy wasn’t doing the same?”

“Phil likes the kid,” Skeppy says, blue fringe falling into his eyes, catching the ball for the final time. “That means I like the kid.”

“Phil only likes him because he’s probably looking for a new worker,” Ant says and Foolish nods his head towards him.

“Aren’t we doing the same?” Fundy interrupts before Puffy can open her mouth. “I mean, by all means, let’s keep dancing around the subject but frankly, I’m getting bored and I can practically sense Wil on the hunt.”

He quietens and Bad rolls his eyes. “Go ahead, Fundy.”

Fundy leans forward, hands clasped together, amber eyes sparking with mischief. “Phil wants Theseus because he’s a powerful ally. Quackity employed an underaged kid because he was talented at crime. There’s a reason Puffy and Sam put that rule into place to stop us speaking to him: they were worried we’d scare him off or push him to his trigger-happy ways.”

Sam raises his eyebrows. “When you put it like that, surely you can see why?”

Fundy grins at him, all fox. Puffy can’t feel angry at him for expressing his views. He’s probably heard from his father that Theseus is able to resist abilities and yet, even in his spiel, he mentioned none of that. Puffy and Sam share a look: they both respect that.

Then again, Fundy is the definition of a fox with a father as a Villain: he’ll use the information given to him to his advantage.

“So you want to employ Tommy?” Quackity hisses and Fundy shrugs.

“I’d rather be the friend of a trigger-happy assassin than his enemy.” He studies his claws as he adds, “plus, getting to the kid before Wil can would make my year.”

“You’re just doing this to one-up your dad?” Drista jumps in. “God, the daddy issues are loud today.”

Fundy opens his mouth to defend himself but Bad interrupts by asking, “why are we treating this like this child is an object and not a person? He’s not a cow to be bought for the slaughter. He’s a sixteen year old boy that’s ran from a clearly horrid organisation.”

“Who was able to take down even Phil,” Foolish reminds him. When Bad shoots him a harsh look, Foolish holds up his hands. “I’m not saying we should hurt him or anything but we should definitely be careful.”

“We are bringing him in, right?” Sam says, looks to Puffy. “We have to make sure he’s okay.”

Slowly, they all look to Puffy and she nods. She has had a plan formulated for awhile now, ever since she saw the way he reacted on that roof, scared and so young.

“We’re going to deal with him like the dangerous individual he is and we’re not going to underestimate him,” she says. “However, we will not-“

There's a low laugh from the elevator as the door opens, a figure stepping out, horns curled around his skull. Unlike Bad's horns, which point up to the sky, these somehow look more threatening.

Dressed in a pressed suit with a red tie, Puffy's brother JSchlatt saunters closer. In his hands, he holds a single piece of paper.

"Theseus," he reads in that smug tone of his. "Successful assault against Dream, minimal injuries and successful graduation ceremony. Confirmed abilities: power neutralisation, post-mortem power absorption--"

"Where the hell did you get that?" Puffy asks and Schlatt grins at her.

"You're not the only one with access to a hacker." He shrugs. "Mine's just better."

"Post-mortem power absorption," Ant says, slowly. "Does that mean he gains the powers of the people he kills?"

Schlatt nods. "And think how many people that kid has murdered? He's dangerous and if Phil and his Syndicate are hunting him down, what happens if he gains the ability of one of them?"

"Nothing good," Fundy mutters. "I'm calling Wil."

He rises and walks away, into the hallway. Puffy looks up at Schlatt. "So what do you suggest we do?"

"Well," he says with a sharp grin, "as the Director of this Committee, I think a kill-order should be in place. If he kills any of you, he could easily wipe out the rest of you."

"I'm not killing a boy," Karl whispers and Schlatt shrugs.

"Then Chronos is no longer working for the Heroes Committee." He claps his hands as the others stare up at him.

This is what Puffy feared. Now that boy will be hunted by not only the Red Room but also Heroes he doesn't know. They're backing him into a corner and she knows what happens after that.

She's seen the lengths people will go when they want to live and she has a feeling Tommy knows too much about how to survive.

"Schlatt, you can't be fucking serious?" Quackity hisses and Schlatt barely blinks at him.

"Deadly, Flatty Patty," he replies, smirk to his lips.

Puffy meets Fundy's eyes through the glass that separates the conference room and the hallway. He nods, spins on his heel and stalks off. Slowly, she meets each of their eyes, watches as Drista reaches out to touch Sam's wrist, calming the smoke spilling from his mask.

They will follow their orders but they will not hurt the boy without prompt.

“Everybody,” she speaks, briefly looking at the photo of her son, “let’s find Tommy.”

Chapter End Notes

Soooooo: Schlatt, Tommy’s powers and the agents amiright???

This is the link to my discord if you want to come and chat:

<https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions! Take care of yourselves and hopefully I’ll be back soon!! <3

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

SO IM BACK WHOOP WHOOP (and a little earlier than expected)

As for updates, they won't be every day but I'm thinking two updates a week ;)

Thank you all for the support!

TW// past abuse, mention of surgery without consent, past brainwashing, violence, blood and injury, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Of course, Tommy's apartment is empty of the boy. He's nowhere to be seen and other than the many, many weapons littered everywhere, his place of residence is nothing to boast about. Even if Phil can make out the strategic way the furniture has been placed.

There's hardly any food in the fridge, the walls are bare and the only personal items are the record player under his bed, the cow plushie on his bed and a mobile phone left on the kitchen counter. One of the floorboards next to the record player has been pulled up, and left askew but the rest of the apartment is spotless.

It doesn't even look like anyone has lived here.

Phil doesn't understand the personal items relevance until Niki stares at the record player with tears in her eyes.

"It was the first thing he ever bought when he was free," she whispers, fingers light as she delicately traces the record. "He told me about it."

Wilbur and Tubbo, on the other hand, are crying at the sight of the cow plushie and mobile phone. Tubbo flutters over, picking up the cow like it holds the secrets to the universe.

"Did he leave you Henry?" He whispers, tears falling from his eyes as he swallows and clears his throat. "Big man didn't want to lose you, huh?"

Tubbo approaches Wilbur, antennae flat on his head and Wilbur gently takes the cow from him. He holds it close to his face, breathing it in.

"I- I gave it to him," Tubbo tells Phil, quietly. "He looked like he'd never seen a plushie before and I wanted him to feel comfortable."

“He didn’t take his phone,” Wilbur whispers in the silence that follows and Phil’s heart only grows heavier.

Phil stays there with them, as Techno looks around and Ranboo stares at the arsenal of guns they find, placing them on the kitchen counter in neat rows. There’s daggers and knives and throwing stars, even a dismantled rifle.

“Where would he go?” Phil asks Niki and she shrugs, picking up the weapons and testing their weight.

“Minx was probably telling him to go back,” Niki says. “They would see him in the airports or train stations and pick him up but I doubt he would.”

“What would you do?” Techno asks and she pauses at that, one hand holding a glock, the other holding its ejected magazine.

“I wouldn’t stay in America,” she says after a moment of thought. “I’d probably head to another continent where a safe house is.”

Then she tilts her head, looking out of Tommy’s windows. Something flickers over her face.

“Do they know who your Russian contact is?” She asks Phil and he shakes his head. “Can they?”

Phil nods. “I was only protecting his identity because of you.”

She smiles, even as the others look to Phil in confusion. Then without another word, she’s stalking from the apartment.

After stopping off at their base of operations for the Syndicate in the Badlands district, and dropping the boys off there - surrounded by Phil’s workers, who will protect those two above all else - they arrive a couple of hours later, outside a townhouse.

Knocking on the door, it swings open to reveal none over than Jack Manifold. With buzzed hair and glasses with red and blue lenses, he appears holding a bowl of noodles in one hand and chopsticks in the other.

He takes in all of them standing there and frowns. “You didn’t say anything about a meeting, Phil.”

He sighs as Wilbur stares at Phil with a deadly gaze. “Jack is your Russian contact?” Wilbur then snaps his head to Jack. “I thought you were British?”

“I am?” Jack says with a furrowed brow.

“Minx showed up,” Niki says, pushing past him into the house. Jack blinks after her as Phil enters, Techno and Wilbur trailing behind. Jack looks between Phil and Niki and she rolls her eyes. “They know.”

“Oh,” he says, puts the bowl of noodles down and grabs his laptop, flicking it open. “Are we trying to track her?”

“No, we’re tracking Tommy.” She says. “Do you have the-“

“CCTV from your bakery? Yes.” Jack nods, fingers typing. “Circulate the image through American airports?”

She nods as she sits beside him, eyes on the screen. “He would’ve gone commercial. Probably used Thomas as a name. He says he’s eighteen so his documents will.”

Phil blinks at them. There’s something familiar here, something that makes them work like a smooth, well-oiled machine.

Jack is his middleman, the one that eases Phil’s problems, talks to his workers. Sure, Niki was the one to introduce them and Jack has his hands in many criminal pockets for Phil but he shouldn’t know about things like this.

Phil clearly hasn’t been paying enough attention.

“I thought you only knew about shipments,” Wilbur breathes, eyebrows raised and Jack shrugs.

“I do.”

“But your Phil’s Russian contact?” Techno drawls and Jack grins at him.

“I worked in Russia for a couple of years, I know my way around. I have more contacts there than Phil does so that’s why I’m his contact.”

Both of them look to Phil. “Jack knows people,” he says, slowly, defensively. “The Syndicate is only as powerful as the people we’re allied with.”

“And you know Niki is a Black Widow?” Techno asks, turning back to Jack and he snorts.

“Yeah. She tried to kill me while I was in Russia.”

“You angered the wrong man,” she replies with a sharp smile.

“I didn’t know the Russians had connections to killer women,” he replies, lightly.

“I was sent to kill him after a meeting gone wrong while Jack was working for-“ Niki begins, turning to face them with warm eyes.

“MI5,” he interrupts and then grins at her. “I was sent to kill you after that.”

“Good thing you made a different call.”

“You were an MI5 agent?” Phil asks, back aching from where he’s hiding his wings. “I thought you worked as an analyst.”

So clearly Phil hasn't been paying any attention to his workers whatsoever.

Jack rolls his eyes. "I did. Briefly."

Wilbur just stares at him, fingers rubbing his temples. "I think my brain is exploding."

"I feel like I need to go and check all of our employment records." Techno adds, hand running through his pink hair.

Jack snorts. "You're good. I check through them to make sure they're not spying or anything-" A ping sounds from his laptop. He looks down. "Thomas Innit. Heading to Graz airport, Austria."

He tilts the screen and Niki nods at the sight. "That's him," she says, tilts her head, pink fringe falling into her eyes. "He could be heading to Vienna or... literally anywhere in Europe from there."

They then share a look. "Bucharest," they murmur with identical fond eyes.

"What happened in Bucharest?" Phil asks and they both just smile, eyes light with amusement.

"Nothing," Niki looks back at the screen. "Keep running it in case he pops up again."

"So how do we find him?" Wilbur asks and Niki shakes her head.

"You don't. We were trained to be able to hide. If he doesn't want to be found, he won't be."

"We can't help him at all?" Phil breathes and Niki's eyes soften.

"I don't know where the new facility is and trying to pick a fight with the Russian government is going to lead the agents to us." She moves to sit up, elbows on her knees, chin in her hands. "We have to trust that he can handle this and that if he can't, he'll make enough noise for us to find him."

"And if he's back in Russia?" Techno asks, voice strained.

Niki looks down and for the first time in the last couple of hours, she looks unsure.

"Then he's back there." She replies, lightly. "We can't take them on-"

A phone rings. Wilbur slips it from his pocket, pressing the answer button and then the speaker button. Immediately, Fundy's voice comes through the speakers before Wilbur can warn him he's speaking aloud.

"We have a problem," the man speaks down the line. "Q and Karl came to tell us about Tommy being Theseus - thanks for not informing me, dad - and then Schlatt showed up saying this kid's abilities are power neutralisation and post-mortem power absorption."

"That's why he refused to kill us," Wilbur breathes. "He doesn't want our powers."

“How did he even find that?” Niki asks, voice hard and the shrug from Fundy is audible down the line.

“Says his hacker is better but look, that’s not the main problem here. Schlatt is sending us after him on a kill-order.”

“Fuck.” Wilbur and Phil hiss at the same time.

“That’s not going to end well,” Techno drawls, crimson eyes burning. “He shot us when he was a little panicked. Think what he’ll do if the entirety of the Heroes show up.”

“Puffy won’t let anything happen to Tommy, so long as he doesn’t hurt one of us. If he does... then it’s fair-game.”

Niki and Jack share a look. “Remember those names I gave you?” She asks and he nods. “Look through them in Russian airports. If we can’t track him, we can hopefully track the agents.”

“Either way,” Phil says with a frown. “We need to get to him first.”

Theseus watches his blood drip onto the floor. He rises en pointe again, ignoring the burning pain and throws the knife.

It embeds in the wall as the music rises to a dramatic crescendo. Theseus dips, pirouettes, the movements so ingrained in his muscles, he could do this in his sleep.

Tomorrow, he will return to his safe house and bring the Semtex in, ready to scatter through the base. For now, he dances alone in the ballet studio.

Earlier, he met some of the other Huntsman Spiders and Black Widows, watched as they trained the younger recruits to go through the obstacle course.

He watched as one of the guards eyed up a young Widow. In a way, being a Spider is better, he doesn’t have to be taught to seduce like they do.

He watched as an older Widow led the guard back to his room. She emerged. He has yet to.

Flipping another blade, he throws it and leaps.

The door opens as he pirouettes. George’s face comes into view. “Eret requires your presence in medical.”

Theseus pauses and slowly drops to the ground, untying his pointe shoes. “What’s happening?”

“Some of the recruits don’t like the idea of surgery.”

Theseus hums. He understands that feeling well but he did the smart thing, he just accepted his fate.

It's always easier if he doesn't fight.

"Let's go," he says and follows George out of the studio, music still faintly playing in the background.

Tommy's ears are ringing as he tumbles out of the car, blood dripping from the side of his head. There's a Widow with a gun out, aimed at Dream and he tackles him to the ground, hearing two shots fire.

The Widow falls, George rises.

Tommy scrambles to pull Dream up, dragging him away from the destroyed car and down into the subway. Sapnap and George quickly following after.

Tommy doesn't try to fight it as the Huntsman takes over.

He wipes the blood from the side of his skull, shakes his head until his ears stop ringing. He pulls his jacket hood over his hair, curling into Sapnap's side as George pulls the fire alarm. They follow the mass of scrambling people leaving the subway in panic, blending into the crowd, George's rifle left in the remains of the car.

They look close to being in the clear until the hair on the back of his neck rises. Tommy reaches and squeezes Sapnap's wrist and the tension bleeds into his shoulders.

Tommy tucks his head against his shoulder, looking around until he spots the reason for his senses to go haywire.

A couple of metres behind, Rae walks in a red coat, brown hair tied up in a ballet bun. Beside her, Sykkuno is chatting, face soft as his hair falls into his eyes.

"Cover me," he mumbles, hunches his shoulders and hangs back. The crowds cover his exit.

Sapnap lifts his head, tilts it so he can look straight at Rae before turning to stalk towards Dream.

Their eyes follow Sapnap and Tommy tugs on all of his senses to scope out the area. He can spot Jack beside Corpse, the man in a bright green t-shirt that almost rivals Dream's, with his hair tied into a man-bun.

It doesn't matter, Tommy has a plan and he hopes Rae and Sykkuno are sensible enough to listen to it.

He waits until they pass him before he slips the gun from his waistband and approaches behind them. He thanks the panicked crowd under his breath for hiding his movements.

He lingers before speaking in low Russian, “don’t make a scene.”

They both tense as he presses the muzzle of the gun to Rae’s back, his other hand snapping out to grab Sykkuno’s wrist.

“Hello, Theseus,” Rae greets, voice calm. “We were all surprised by your defection. Especially when Dream’s little team followed. You’re lucky Eret wants you all alive.”

“Good to know.” Tommy hums. “As for my defection: shit food, uncomfortable bed, you know how it is.”

“If it’s all about the food and bed, I’m sure we can make some arrangements,” Sykkuno says, lightly. “You’re not the only one with food complaints.”

Tommy can see light above and knows he’s running out of time. The minute they’re in the open, anything can happen.

“Look,” he says, getting to the point, “either you leave me the fuck alone, or I shoot both of you in the head and then find Corpse. After that, I think I’ll have the power to level this entire fucking country.”

They’re silent until Rae mutters, “if you were serious, you would’ve shot us when you spotted us.”

“Unlike you,” he spits, “I don’t want to be a killer. I was free. Do you even know what that’s like, to have choices and opinions? So we can either do this the nice way where we part ways and no one has to get hurt, or I see how quickly I can cause a natural disaster.”

Yet again they’re silent but he can see them sending each other quick glances. He’s quiet as they walk, gun still pressed to Rae’s back.

“We’ve been given a week,” Sykunno says to him.

“You get three days,” Rae adds. “Then you will have to shoot us in the head.”

He nods. “Understood.”

He goes to step away when Rae stops him, an oddly gentle hand on his wrist. Her eyes are burning when they make eye contact. The crowd parts around them.

“I’m not a traitor,” she says with a harsh swallow. “But I do want to know what being free is like.”

“We’ll try our best,” he says as he spots his brothers lingering by the stairs, watching them intently, as if preparing for the sound of gunfire and screams.

In a way, the Room may have trained killers but they also bred loyalty. They may all be under Eret’s thumb, but even a solitary spider meets others while weaving a web.

Each of them are the only ones left from their classes.

Twenty-eight to one.

They're the elite, the survivors, the winners. The only ones that could ever understand what surviving the Room is like.

Of course, they would connect to one another, bond in the brief glances and subtle touches.

Tommy isn't the only one who wishes to be freed from the silk ensnaring him in place, making him more prey than predator.

Rae and Sykkuno drift to where Corpse and Jack are watching. As he approaches Dream, he sees Minx be stopped by Brooke appearing from the end of the subway, tugging her to where the others are standing.

Once next to George, Tommy says, "we have three days."

They all share a look. "To America it is then."

Tommy frowns, follows as they begin to walk away. "Wait, what's in America?"

"The Angel of Death," Sapnap mutters and when Tommy nearly trips over his feet, he laughs. Swinging an arm over his shoulders, he adds, "didn't you hear, Tommy? The quickest way to find Death is to talk to her Angel."

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts?? We're approaching plot ;)

Thank you so much for your comments, kudos and interactions! Take care of yourselves... if I have to, then all of you do too! <3

My discord: <https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

We're back!

TW// past abuse, mention of brainwashing, mention of child injury, violence, injury, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy is only slightly regretting his life choices.

The flight should take a little over ten hours and Tommy can't help but sigh when he realises he's surrounded by threats.

Two rows up, Minx and Jack are hissing insults in their Irish accents, Corpse giggling from beside them. Three rows down, Tina and Brooke sit, chatting quietly to each other.

It seems they've learnt their lesson by not giving Tommy easy targets. Well, Tina is one of them but he's unlikely to pick a fight with her near so much metal.

"Calm down," George says in Polish. "You've got us three days, let's use them wisely."

"Well we've already lost a day at the end of this," Sapnap murmurs, swirling his drink around.

"Can we focus on the fact you want me to talk to the Angel of Death when I pissed off his kid?" Tommy hisses.

Up here, like this, his back burns. In a way, it's a welcome pain, a grounding one. Just because Spiders and Widows are not affected by pain, doesn't mean they don't feel it, almost welcome it.

Up here, his mind tells him he could be flying, he could be soaring. The reality is that if he gives into that impulse, he'll be out of it for a couple of hours at the very least.

He can't make himself a burden, not here, not now.

Dream must see his twitching and asks, softly, "when did you last-?"

Tommy looks at him. "Graduation."

All three of them snap their heads around to stare at him. “What?” Sapnap whispers, George’s expression darkens.

“You could be hurting yourself.”

“It hurts anyway,” Tommy snaps back. “I survived because everyone I killed, I took their power and their life. They are just reminders of what’s been fucking lost.”

For a moment they’re silent as Tommy leans back in his chair. He ignores the burn in his back and rolls his shoulders. Closing his eyes - knowing he’ll be safe with his brothers watching - he takes a deep breath.

“I could try and speak to Niki,” he reasons, switching to Ukrainian, changing the subject. “She’s an ex-Widow.”

There’s no point trying to hide her identity. Especially if it all goes south. He likes her and if he’s going to rely on anyone who isn’t his brothers, it’s going to be her.

“She got out?” Sapnap asks and Tommy nods.

“Been out for awhile now. It seems every time one of us leaves, they wipe us of their memory.”

Dream snorts. “Good to hear.” There’s a pause and then, he adds, “try and contact Niki and then speak to the Angel. What do you know?”

Tommy blinks his eyes open, knowing exactly what he means, says, “Phil, the Angel, is the dad of the group. Has wings, controls death, heals quick but his weaknesses are his children and young kids who need a home.”

“No wonder you fit in,” Sapnap idly comments and Tommy leans around George to hit Sapnap on the chest.

“Technoblade is the eldest. Dubbed the Blood God, he can increase your fear levels and blood-bend. Weaknesses are his family and the fact he’s cocky.”

Dream turns to grin at Tommy. “Did you kick his ass?”

Tommy smirks back. “God, it felt fucking fantastic.”

Dream laughs, George rolls his eyes. Up ahead, Corpse and Jack end up switching seats to block Minx’s hitting hands. Sapnap grins as he watches them.

“Wilbur is Morningstar, the one I stopped Minx from killing,” Tommy continues. “He can compel people with his voice, command them to do anything. I- I think he can maybe read things from people too because I used to get some pretty bad memories whenever I was near him. Weaknesses: his cockiness, his protectiveness, his brothers and his intense emotions.”

George hums. “The Heroes are there, too?”

Tommy nods. "I've only met Trigger, the Captain and Chronos and I can confirm what the Room told us about them. At least I assume, I obviously wasn't affected by anything."

"We need to tread carefully then," George says, shifts in his seat. Then, he unclips his belt and rises, scooting past Sapnap and heading for Tina and Brooke.

They all watch as he leans over the chairs, talking lowly to them, probably in another language. From up ahead, the others are also watching the interaction carefully.

George nods to them after a moment of discussion and then walks back. Pushing Sapnap out of the way, he sits back down and clicks his seatbelt back on.

"Uh, what?" Sapnap breathes and George rolls his eyes.

"It doesn't help any of us if the whole point of them being here is to get us back to the Room and then we end up dying by one of the Villains." George explains, leaning back in his seat. "I've told them what's happening and that Tommy gets to unleash his new-found feral behaviour if they try to stop it or involve themselves. They'll step in if anything goes wrong."

Dream nods, reaches for Tommy's hand. It's comforting and Tommy finds himself relaxing back at the contact.

His back doesn't ache as much.

"Try and stay away from Wilbur, or at least block your ears." Tommy says and then twists to nudges his face against Dream's shoulder. "We'll try Niki, if that doesn't work... well, we're fucking screwed but Gogy will think of something."

"You could just exploit Phil's clear need to adopt poor, helpless things." Sapnap mutters and Tommy flips him off.

"Just got to see if Wilbur is pissed at me. If he isn't, we're all good."

"As for the others, when we know we can kill the woman, we'll deploy the vials." George says.

"Vials?" Tommy whispers in English and Dream tugs him closer.

"They block Eret's ability," he murmurs in Mandarin. "It's why we can defect."

"So you can take a rifle and..." Tommy trails off, back in Polish and Dream grins.

"Yes."

"Thank fucking god," he replies and then tucks his face back in Dream's shoulder.

"We're trying to store them," Sapnap adds. "Make sure we don't burn through them if we only end up back in the Room's hands."

"Sleep," Dream says, lightly when Tommy simply nods in response. "We'll keep watch."

“Only the big man Corpse is allowed to kill me,” Tommy mutters, closing his eyes.

Sapnap snorts, Tommy has reason to believe George is rolling his eyes.

Knowing he’s safe, he succumbs to sleep.

Before them, Cinderella plays on the screen. Over and over and over again.

Theseus sits amongst the other recruits, twenty remain from the original twenty-eight. Together, in unison they mouth the words.

They’ve watched this particular piece of American media before, but they were only told to watch and remember the words. Theseus still remembers two of the boys that could not understand what some of the words were.

They both came back with dazed eyes and broken wrists.

Now, they are instructed to copy the dialogue until it’s more muscle memory than anything else.

Slowly, their Russian accents begin to blur.

On occasion, they will pause the film and tell them to continue speaking.

One boy can’t get the accent right. He’s slapped until he does.

Theseus sits in that chair, straight back, eyes forward as he repeats the words over and over again.

They have a brief respite after eight hours.

The next film is Snow White.

Phil’s house is empty. Tubbo and Ranboo’s house is empty. Niki’s Bakery remains closed with no one inside.

Which leaves only one option.

“Welcome to Las Nevadas,” Tommy says in English, Sapnap’s eyes wide as he stares at the building he probably used to frequent. “The land of the morally grey. Nothing is off limits so long as you pay.”

“This is where-?” Dream asks and Sapnap nods.

“Quackity owns this.” He breathes. “He was the official target. They wanted information on his contacts, the many pockets he had his hands in. Things got... out of hand.”

George snorts. "I'm sure they did."

"You two have been in a secret relationship for how long?" Sapnap hits back.

"Can you three shut the fuck up?" Tommy hisses.

They walk the familiar halls Tommy has walked hundreds of times. It seems different now, odd, strange. Las Nevadas in the light always looks wrong, as though it shouldn't exist, as though the illusion is broken.

There is always less staff in the daytime and by the looks of it, Quackity appears to be out, which is a problem.

The office is empty and Tommy sighs. As he stares at the desk, the other three walk around, scanning the room with any assassin's eye.

George finds a gun under the desk, raising an eyebrow at Sapnap. "If this is for you..."

"Sap's in the dog house," Dream mutters, scanning the spines of the books on the bookshelves.

The hair on the back of Tommy's neck rises. He snaps upright, looking to the door. Then he feels the familiarity of the footsteps and waves the others down.

Stalking to the door, he tilts it to hide them and leans his head around the door. "Charlie," he greets with a genuine smile.

"Tommy!" Charlie calls back. "Haven't seen you in a couple of days."

The man doesn't look bothered by Tommy being so close. It leaves him thrown, especially when Charlie returns his grin.

"You didn't hear about-?" Tommy asks with a blink and Charlie cocks his head.

"You being this super fucking cool assassin?" Charlie replies, looking calm. Tommy schools his features as the man shrugs. "I don't give a shit about your past. You're Tommy. The Tommy that is obsessed with ice cream flavours and pets any dog he sees."

"You still trust me?" Tommy whispers, completely thrown and the man rolls his eyes.

"Are you going to kill me?" Tommy shakes his head, Charlie smiles. "Then we're good."

"Oh." Tommy mutters and then clears his throat. He's here for a reason, not to bond with Charlie. "I'm trying to find Phil. I thought Quackity might have something--"

"Have you tried the Syndicate?" Charlie interrupts, pushing his glasses back up his nose.

Tommy blinks. "I thought that was the name, not a place."

Charlie laughs, leans closer and says in a low tone, "all Villains have a secret lair, Tomathy."

“What the fuck?” Tommy groans. “I didn’t realise they were fucking corny Villains. Secret, stupid lair. I bet it’s designed to look all scary on the outside but Wilbur’s made the inside all soft.”

Charlie snorts. “Probably, knowing Wilbur’s taste in interior design.”

Tommy hums. “You wouldn’t happen to know where said secret lair is?”

“Are you planning on killing any of them?” Charlie asks and Tommy shakes his head.

“I- I-“ Tommy swallows, opens the door wider so that Charlie can see Dream, George and Sapnap. “These are my brothers. We just want to be free and we can’t do that without help.”

Charlie’s eyes take in Dream’s scar and George’s slight build and the way Sapnap is cradling rings in his hand that he probably found in one of Quackity’s draws, looking at them with a distraught frown. Something flickers across Charlie’s face, not pity but sympathy.

“The Badlands,” Charlie says, finally. “There’s a warehouse with red doors, close to the forest that has guards out front. Underneath that is the Syndicate’s base.”

At Tommy’s stare, Charlie shrugs. “Quackity took me there once when Wilbur kept dodging his calls. Told me to sneak in but Wil showed up before I could goop my way through the walls.”

Tommy finds himself rolling his eyes. “Wilbur appears to constantly dodge Quackity’s calls.” Nodding to Charlie, he reaches to pat his shoulder. “Thanks, man.”

“Anytime,” Charlie grins as Tommy steps past him. He’s quickly followed by Dream, George and Sapnap.

They make no move to interfere.

It isn’t until they’re at the end of the hallway that Charlie calls, “Tommy? Be safe.”

Tommy pauses, smiles at him. His chest aches because he doesn’t know if he can live through this. He can’t promise Charlie anything but the man has been nothing but kind to him.

“I’ll try,” he calls back and leaves, wanting nothing more than to run back and ignore his responsibilities.

Outside, they get back in the rental car Dream picked up and Tommy leads them to the Badlands. All four of them aware of the car following them, knowing that the Widows and Spiders aren’t going to let them out of their sights.

Sure enough, after driving around the Badlands, the warehouse is pretty obvious.

Dream parks in the forest, the following car also pulling up beside them, and they get out. Here, they can use the forest to their advantage.

Tommy wants to let the Huntsman out: it would be easier. They could probably have the warehouse taken over in a matter of minutes but this isn't how he wants to play it.

"Ready?" He asks and they all nod.

With a hard swallow, Tommy steps out from the trees and begins to walk forward. He makes sure to stare at the many cameras littered around the exterior.

He keeps his shoulders back, his head held high.

He will not die here. His brothers won't let him. However, if he must fall, he will do so as a Huntsman.

The security guards watch as he stalks forward and stops to stand before them.

"Hi," he greets. "I'm Tommy. I think I have an appointment with the Angel."

The security guards glance at each other and then back at him. "I don't think you do, kid," one of them says and Tommy sighs.

"Look," he says, tapping his wrist. "I'm running out of time so either, get your boss or get out of my way."

"That's cute, kid, but--"

Tommy darts toward, throat punching the tallest one before wrapping himself around the second. He flips the man, his head colliding with the ground and catches the gun shakily raised in his direction by the other guard. Swiping the legs out from under him, Tommy smashes the guard's gun into his temple.

In seconds, both of them lay limp on the ground.

Tommy snorts, puts the safety back on the gun and drops it by the guard's feet.

He takes three, large steps back and sits on the ground, waiting.

From his position, spotting the others is practically impossible so he knows they're in the clear for now. He'd rather not involve his brothers unless necessary.

A minute later - good but also extremely terrible considering Tommy could've been in the building by now - they appear. All three look down at the security guards with intrigued eyes.

None of them are wearing masks but Phil's wings are hidden and Techno has his sword at his side. Tommy looks at them from the ground and slowly rises, brushing his hands on his jeans.

He moves his jacket around, showing that he's not armed- well, he has a dagger in his boot but he's not giving that up.

"So," he says, awkwardly, taking in their surprised stares. "Hi. Um, sorry about--"

Wilbur steps forward. Tommy instinctively steps back. Sharp pain flashes across Wilbur's face and Tommy's laugh is strained as it leaves his lips.

"You're not going to kill me right?" Tommy asks and Wilbur's frowns.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?" He replies and Tommy winces, picking at his t-shirt with his fingers. "I didn't- Tommy, I'm sorry-"

The door opens again and Niki appears, dressed in all black, her pink hair tied up. She stalks forward, stepping over the bodies and smiles in relief at the sight of him.

"You didn't go back," she breathes and he nods.

"You told them?" He asks and she nods.

"Not everything, not like I could but enough." She says and his shoulders relax. "What do you need?"

"I want to be free." Tommy says to her and then looks up at Phil and says, "you wouldn't happen to know a Kristin, would you?"

Chapter End Notes

More discussions!!

And also, strap in lads, it's about to be a very bumpy ride...

Thank you all for your support! Take care of yourselves... <3

Here's my discord:

<https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Just to forewarn you: the angsty main plot has begun so strap in ;)

Also, for the people in my discord: Reeth my beloved is in this chapter <3

TW// past abuse, brief mention of children getting hurt, brief child death, brief mention of suicidal ideation, past brainwashing, trigger phrases/words used, violence, blood, injury, gore, body horror, mention of death, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy does not like the way all three of them tense, Phil's eyes hardening. "What?" He asks and Tommy shrugs, hoping that if anything happens, Niki should step in before his brothers can get involved.

God, that'll be a catastrophe.

"Kristin," Tommy repeats, shifting on his feet to appear worried. Niki clocks it instantly and something sad passes over her face.

How many times has Tommy twitched or shifted to appear more human? How many times has his body lied quicker than he ever could?

In the Room, he was taught to be still and silent. To remain standing and never fall. To be a spider in a web, no need for excess movement unless prey is to be caught, to be spun in the silk, to be hunted.

Tommy looks away, back to Phil. "Kristin. She can help, supposedly."

"I'm sorry," Wilbur speaks before Phil can. "You've been running around this city for weeks as Theseus and promptly dipped the minute we found out only to stumble back because you need our help?"

"Wil," Niki says, voice hard but Wilbur is staring at Tommy and something inside him snaps.

"Minx was aiming for your fucking forehead," he snaps, low and deadly. All three reel back like they've been hit. "I saw it, I jumped in to make sure that didn't happen. I put myself in front of that gun. Niki told you what it was like, right? Did she tell you that doing that - putting myself in harms way for someone I considered a friend, a brother even - goes against every single bit of training?"

“A brother?” Phil murmurs under his breath. No one acknowledges him.

Wilbur just stares, even as pain burns in his eyes. “So we’re just supposed to trust you now?”

Tommy snorts. “I get it, okay? I do. To be aware of the fact a kid kicked all of your arses must fucking suck but I’m not here to sooth your ego. I’m here because right now, I’m getting hunted. So help, or don’t. But if I can’t be free, I’m either under their control again or dead.”

Tommy doesn’t know how many Spiders and Widows he saw strung up for target practice. He hopes, if it comes to that, some of the students are competent. He hopes they get him in one bullet or two.

He still remembers an older Spider, one who had the ability to unzip his skin and had prehensile ribs. They would call him Reeth, because his ribs were like his teeth.

And yet, half-way into the program, he had tried to wipe out his entire class. Three students were eaten, their dorms a mess of blood and organs. He had fled when caught - taking out a considerable amount of guards - and that’s how Tommy found himself watching as it took eight bullets before the boy died, ribs twitching as he fought to the very end.

Tommy’s pretty sure Corpse was there, before his facial scarring, but he doesn’t remember much more after that.

“Tommy, I’m not letting them-“ Niki tries and Tommy shakes his head.

“They’re already here,” Tommy says. “Check Budapest’s local news and the shit-show that went down.”

Her eyes widen, scanning him for injuries. “I’m good,” he reassures. “Nothing like a little pain to wake you up.”

“That’s not healthy at all,” Techno comments and Tommy rolls his eyes.

“Yeah, yeah.” He looks to Phil, ignores the ache in his back. “Kristin or no Kristin?”

Phil studies him. “The Heroes are after you.”

“I gathered,” he says with an eye roll.

“Power neutralisation and post-mortem power absorption, huh?” Techno adds and Tommy resists the urge to tense. “Who’s Dream?”

Tommy looks at Niki. “How?”

“The Director of the Heroes Committee,” she informs him, ignoring the way all three of them shoot her betrayed glances. “JSchlatt. I’ve never met him but according to some-“

“He’s a fucking pain.” Wilbur interrupts. “All he cares about is publicity, not about people. Puffy practically runs it.”

“Schlatt,” Tommy repeats, sounding the name out. It sounds familiar on his tongue, like he’s heard it before.

He just can’t remember when or where.

“That doesn’t answer-“ Tommy tries to speak but Wilbur is quick to interrupt.

“You haven’t answered any of our questions.”

Tommy straightens, blue eyes burning. “Did I know about you all being Villains? Not until I was in your house. Did I purposely target you for the Room? No. I’ve been free for months now. Do I want to kill any of you? No, I’m better now, I’m not the killer they made me. Or at least, trying to be better.”

“And Dream?” Techno asks, hand twitching on the pommel of his sword.

“My brother,” he replies with a shrug. “Close enough to a real one, anyway.”

“You do have brothers?” Wilbur whispers and Tommy sighs.

“Yes, I wasn’t lying about that. I didn’t really explicitly lie about anything.” He shrugs. “We’re taught that lies can get easily mixed up. It’s better to stick close to the truth.”

“You fight your brothers?” Phil asks and Tommy looks at him, remembers that final assessment like it was yesterday.

“To survive? Back in the Room, if told to, I’d kill them.”

Techno tenses. Wilbur’s eyes widen and his mouth opens and closes like a fish. Phil’s pales considerably. Niki’s face does not change. She barely even blinks but there is understanding there.

“Look,” Tommy groans. “Can you help or not?”

They all share a look and then Phil sighs. “I can’t contact her.”

Tommy blinks. “What?”

“Kristin is a free spirit,” he replies. “She’s always on the move-“

“You don’t have, like, a phone number or something?”

Techno rolls his eyes, Phil shakes his head. “No, I don’t.”

“So I have no way of contacting her?” Tommy hisses and he tries to stop the way his face drops.

This has been for nothing.

Tommy ran from the Room because he wanted to be free. He ran from L’Manberg to protect the people he unwittingly grew close to. He ran from Budapest because of the plan his

brothers made back into L'Manberg.

And yet, L'Manberg has nothing to hold him here, nothing to secure his future.

He's back to square one and square one was the Room.

"Fuck," he whispers, looks to the sky.

"What did you need Kristin for?" Phil tentatively asks and Tommy shrugs.

"There's this woman," he replies. "I know how to save the others but this woman is literally impossible to kill. I was told that she was the answer to that particular fucking problem."

Even if they kill Eret, will they ever be free of her?

Will Tommy ever actually be free?

Or will he always be the monster under the bed, the boy that has fangs for teeth and claws for hands, the Huntsman Spider that kills?

"I'm sorry," Phil says and Tommy finally looks down from the sky. He doesn't look at Phil, though, he looks at Niki.

"You're not safe here," he tells her. "If they- if I can't get out-"

They may not have the chair anymore but the Room has never really needed it. All it takes will be a gun to Dream or George or Sapnap's temple and Tommy won't hesitate. His own pain is nothing compared to theirs.

Her blue-green eyes are sad but understanding. "I'll be okay, don't worry about me."

She doesn't say she'll come with him, she also doesn't mention anything about a location. Tommy nods to her. She nods back.

A Widow and a Huntsman.

For old times sake, he falls into first position and bows at the waist, dipping low. The way they were taught when fighting.

She's quick to copy him, dipping down and rising. Mutual respect, mutual acknowledgment, mutual understanding.

Tommy steps away, giving the three men a sloppy salute. "See you around, boys, or maybe not. It's been good. Tell Tubso that he's a clingy bitch and tell Ranboo I hate him."

He turns, ready to walk, when he's stopped by a soft grip to his wrist. He looks back and Wilbur is staring at him with wide eyes, curly hair flopping into his face.

"I'm sorry for acting like a dick," he says, quietly. "But I see you as my little brother. I can't let you go knowing you're going to possibly end up dying."

“Big dubs, it has to be done,” he says with a faux grin. “I can’t stay here. My only option is to run. Canada is nice this time of year.”

“Toms-“ Wilbur says, opening his mouth to speak but Tommy will never find out what he was going to say as lightning strikes the ground a metre from his body.

Theseus doesn’t like training the younger recruits, not that he’d ever say it out loud.

He hates it because when he looks at them, he sees an innocence that he knows will be broken out of them soon enough. They are small and weak and so, so young.

There are seven classmates including him left. Twenty-eight to seven. Theseus can’t believe the dorm he sleeps in used to be filled with twenty-seven other boys, all breathing as one.

As he stares at the new recruits - twenty-eight, wide eyed and still too young to understand the horror of the world they were taken to - bile crawls up his throat.

“I don’t-“ One of the boys begins to speak and the teacher slaps him. Hard. Theseus doesn’t blink, doesn’t look away even as his body instinctively tenses, wanting nothing more than to intervene.

He can’t. He knows he can’t. He wants to live.

The boy whimpers, eyes flooded with tears. The teacher stares down at them, gaze as cold as the ice outside.

“Anyone else?” He asks and the silence is telling. “Good. Theseus?”

He instantly falls to first position and then lifts en pointe. He stays in the position, back straight, chin high, eyes forward.

“Now, you dance.” The teacher says and the boys scramble to follow instructions.

“Or you die,” is left unsaid.

The lightning hits a metre in front of them and the electricity burns in the air. Tommy and Wilbur are thrown apart and for that moment in the sky, Tommy’s entire back erupts into flames.

He lands and rolls, panting as he fights back his instincts. He will not give in, not here, not now. Reeling in the urge to fly, he pushes himself upright and waves off his brothers.

He’s fine.

As the sky darkens, a group of individuals round the corner. In seconds, Niki has disappeared and the Syndicate’s three leaders all have their masks on, Phil’s wings flaring out behind him.

Tommy's only mildly envious.

Tommy can just make out Trigger's green hair and the Captain's tricorne hat. There's a large fox by the Captain's heel and a panther next to the fox. Levitating above the ground, a girl sits with crossed legs, smiley-face mask covering her face. Behind the Captain, an individual stands in gold armour and a shark's jaws thrown open to reveal a gold face and vibrant green eyes.

A little way away, two individuals stand alone. A man with all black skin and horns curled to the sky next to a man that looks like his skin is made of diamond. A car sits behind them, the window tinted but rolled down. Tommy can't see who's sitting in there.

Tommy focuses on the Captain, keeping his posture straight but relaxing his muscles.

"Theseus," the Captain greets and Tommy finds himself rolling his eyes.

"Tommy," he corrects. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"We simply want to talk," Trigger says, placatingly, hands held up in a surrender.

Tommy cocks his head, feels the way the Huntsman begins to take over. "Really? Because there's a lot of you here so I'm guessing this is more of a killing me situation."

"No one is killing you," Phil snaps, stepping to place himself between Tommy and the Heroes. His wings open, blocking Tommy from view.

"We have direct orders," Totem says, his gold skin glowing.

"Walk away," Wilbur hisses, voice honeyed and all of them take multiple steps back before pausing. He opens his mouth again only for Chaos to wave her hand from where she's levitating, a muzzle appearing on Wilbur's face.

Techno is quick to step up and through the boar's mask, his crimson eyes spark with anger. The Heroes begin to shake, but Phil lays a hand on his shoulder, helping Wilbur remove the muzzle.

"If we bring him in, no one has to get hurt," the Captain says.

"I'm sorry," Tommy speaks, looking over Phil's wings. "But I'm not going anywhere with you. I have places to be and people to see."

All the Heroes step up only for the red doors to open again. Niki steps out and she stands as every Widow should, shoulders back, head held high.

"Remember that deal we had?" Niki asks the Captain and there's a softness to her voice, a warmth and Tommy just knows this is Puffy, her girlfriend. "The one where my past catches up to me? Please, walk away before you can't."

Another person leaves the red doors and Tommy finds himself looking at a man wearing red and blue glasses. He's dressed in a leather jacket and Tommy knows there are guns hidden

under there.

“Niki,” the Captain - Puffy - breathes. “Schlatt isn’t giving us a choice.”

“No,” a man, Tommy’s assuming he’s Schlatt, calls from the car. “I’m not.”

The door opens, he steps out and Tommy snaps his head around. There’s something too familiar about him, about the sideburns, about the horns. He walks to stand a few yards behind Chaos and Tommy can feel his eyes on him.

“Tommy, huh? You’re the Russian, right? So you know about Sputnik-“

Tommy pauses at that, watches as Niki also stills. His mind goes quiet and everything around him blurs at the edges.

He can’t hear what Schlatt continues to say, can’t even hear what has Phil’s wings puffing up in anger. All he knows is that he wants to sleep, that he wants to sit down and curl up-

A shot rings out.

It snaps Tommy from his haze and while the others duck, Niki and him both snap their heads around to see Schlatt’s white shirt flood red. Not near his heart but his shoulder and even he looks confused by it.

Puffy reaches for Chaos, pulling her down as Techno flips his sword out. Slowly, everyone turns to Tommy. He blinks at them and only then does he realise why.

In his haze, he’s grabbed the gun he threw down from the security guard, flicked the safety off and fired at Schlatt.

“Oh,” he whispers, not remembering any of that.

Niki also has a gun in her hands and they stare at each other, understanding clear as day. “Did he-?” She breathes before snapping her head to Puffy. “Don’t-“

It’s too late.

The Demon and his sidekick are at Schlatt’s side as the sky darkens, static filling the air. Tommy is ducking and rolling before he can blink, lightning striking.

“Please don’t make me hurt you,” he pleads, gun heavy in his hands. He still feels wrong, like he should be sleeping but the Huntsman is waking up.

“You shot the Director,” Totem hisses and from there, it’s simply chaos.

The wind picks up as Dream, George and Sapnap appear from the trees. George starts to shoot even as the Heroes try and duck. Dream dodges Techno’s sword, slipping under it and flipping him to ground, fist clenching as the ground erupts. Sapnap’s eyes light with flames as he wades through Trigger’s explosions without a single burn or scratch.

“We’re not killing anyone!” Tommy yells but it seems to fall on deaf ears as the other agents spill from the trees.

Rae’s hand shakes as she fiddles with rocks in her hands. With a smirk, she throws them, each tiny rock becoming a mini-grenade as they hit the ground. Sykunno, Dream and Sapnap pair up as the rain from the sky shifts into ice and Sapnap’s fire roars stronger.

Niki keeps Jack and Wilbur back, her eyes wide as she comes face to face with Minx.

Jack swings a katana as Brooke sits at the sidelines, watching as Leslie blinks in and out, Tina helping George but handing him bullets as her hand clenches, twisting Techno’s sword. Toast sits by Leslie, calling out weakness in Russian as Corpse tries to get close to the Heroes, who all seem to sense that they need to stay away from him.

Tommy would think they’re outnumbered, that the agents will easily best them. Until the Heroes seem to take their numbers as challenge.

Any agent near Puffy seems to start to choke or conveniently trip. Trigger and Rae seem evenly matched, throwing explosions back and forth. The Demon has dark spikes curling from the ground, grabbing at any agent within distance. Chaos seemed to be spawning things from thin air, using weapons to fight and items to hide. The panther shifts into a person that almost seems to copy every move shown to him while the fox lingers by Wilbur.

Niki and Minx circle each other, Niki trying to stop Minx with sharp words. Wilbur focuses on trying to goad the agents away with his honeyed words while Techno and Dream fight one another. Phil, on the other hand, is staring Tommy down, that plague mask burning holes into Tommy.

They don’t move, barely twitch as the world around them goes crazy. Nothing seems to get close to them, a buzzing ringing in his ears.

He doesn’t know if Schlatt is dying, doesn’t really know why he pulled the trigger, but he wonders if Phil can feel it, wonders if death is around the corner.

Tommy can’t see Phil’s eyes. He’s glad. He doesn’t want to know if Phil sees him as a monster, as the cold-blooded killer he was trained to be. Is Phil disgusted with him? Is Phil finally realising just what Tommy is?

Phil tilts his head and a strange noise filters past the cacophony of yells around them. It’s like a shrill ringing, almost like a high-pitched trill.

At first Tommy mirrors him, cocking his head in response. Then he feels it, the burning in his back. Muscles ripple as his spine arches and he collapses, panting. He tries to resist it, tries to stop his natural instincts but he can’t.

His flesh tears. Blood pools from his skin, bones flexing and shifting in the sinew. A pushing sensation floods his veins as his wings push past the barrier of his back, his shirt and jacket.

He shudders as his ruined, crimson feathers touch the air for the first time in just over half a year. His wings arch and he lets out an involuntary whine as they flap.

A hand touches the back of his neck, the chirp grows louder as he pushes back into the pressure. It's comforting, soothing.

"Tommy." Phil's voice cuts through the noise. "Tommy--"

He forces himself away, wings aching from disuse. His blood drips onto the ground below, washed away by the rain. His shirt and jacket are torn and his entire body is on fire.

He looks up through blurred vision. Dream's attention is now firmly on him, fighting against Techno as Wilbur pauses in his attack to stare.

Chronos - Karl - isn't here but it feels like time is slowly down.

Tommy watches as Schlatt shifts on the ground, hand suddenly holding a gun. He does not aim at Tommy, though. He's not even aiming at any of the agents.

Tommy pushes away from Phil, stumbling as he ignores the dull throbbing of pain. Lightning strikes and rain pours from the sky, the ground shifts restlessly under his feet.

Tommy feels like the time they drugged him in the Room, the time they made him fight while intoxicated.

For a moment, he wonders if he has killed Karl as time seems to stop.

Schlatt's finger slips to pull the trigger. The gun fires, bullet leaving the chamber in a flash. Tommy throws himself forward, everything burning as his wings push him those extra centimetres so that he's blocking Wilbur.

At first, he doesn't feel anything.

The ground erupts around them as Dream moves the earth. Leslie throws the Heroes and the Villains back, Tina ripping the metal from the warehouses and forcing them into quick cages.

Tommy watches as he collapses to the ground, a sudden heat burning in his chest. He sits back on his knees, staring at the blood now dripping from his chest.

"Oh," he whispers as he feels an arm suddenly lock around his waist, pulling him up.

"C'mon, kid," Corpse's deep voice fills his ears. "Please don't hit me with your wing."

Tommy just blinks as his mind starts to scream in panic, low whine leaving his throat. His wings flutter from where Corpse is half-holding him, half-dragging him along.

"Tommy?" George asks and Tommy only knows it's him because of his voice. His vision is blurry and he can't focus on anything.

There's a too-hot hand on his face and he knows it's Sapnap's. The whine stops in his throat at the contact.

"Theseus?" Dream asks but it's quieter, fading out of his hearing range. "Fuck! He's- look-when-"

Tommy's eyelids flutter as his wings close around him. He can hear the steady beat of his heart begin to stutter, slowing as everything else frays at the edge, senses dimming.

His heartbeat grows quieter and Tommy closes his eyes, content to die in the arms of his brothers.

Chapter End Notes

To clarify, his heart is still beating :)

My discord if you wish to yell at me:
<https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

Thank you all for your comments, kudos and interactions! Take care of yourselves, that's a threat <3

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

This one is a little strange lads

And to my lovely discord: the blackberry bush is in this chapter ;)

Also!! If you check the 'spider versus web' series you can check out the prequels to this fic!! (Thank you, Glitch) <3

TW// arachnophobia, violence, mention of seizures, blood and injury, gore, temporary character death (TEMPORARY), dissociation, depersonalisation, hallucinations/nightmares, children committing violence, child death, brainwashing, past abuse, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Red Room starts because of a lack of soldiers.

There in the fields of France, history is made and changed. Great Britain and their allies prove they are a force to be reckoned with.

In the cold snow of Russia, a decision is finalised. They will not need armies of soldiers, no. They will simply have a group of individuals that can best entire armies by themselves.

The Red Room starts with generals and a woman they call Madame B. They use the only natural resource that the world has too much of: girls.

"Theseus," the woman breathes as he writhes in the cargo plane, blood pooling from his chest. "Are you the spider or are you the fly?"

It is nine-teen thirty-five and war is brewing.

In the snow of Siberia, a woman walks across the frozen ground, wolves at her heel. She can sense the tide change, knows that soon her sister will be amongst the bloody battlefields.

Most importantly, her sister will be distracted because in times of war, Death is summoned and Life follows.

For centuries, she has bided her time, planning and plotting her revenge.

She is Life, after all, and she knows the fruits of her labour, she knows the best of her crop.

Even now, there are ones she can sense through the veil. Once she's secured her place, she will begin to hunt them down.

For now, she makes her way to Belarus, leaving no footprints in the snow.

"Tommy- open your eyes! Fucking- open- please," one of his brothers hiss. "Come on- don't stop--"

Tommy can feel himself be lifted, head hanging limply down as stars flash behind his eyelids. Everything aches and burns and the horrid taste of metal fills his mouth.

"Don't you dare fucking die on me," someone else snaps and Tommy let's the darkness consume him.

She is the first one to come up with the Huntsman Spider program.

Training little boys alongside the girls. The first recruit to pass is known as Sky.

After that, more children flood through the main door and only one out of the twenty-eight survives.

There's a girl who is obsessed with pumpkin pie, a boy who can turn into a giant squid, a boy who's fingers sparkle. There's a girl who can control shadows, a boy who can clone himself into different people even if they have the same voice, a boy that can shapeshift into a cat.

Through the years, she hones her craft.

The chair is important for keeping them compliant but some of them still lash out at their Handlers, at her.

She watches them self-destruct, falling into the arms of her sister.

So she searches her crops for a specific child, and finds the young boy on the streets of London.

Dropping to a crouch before the boy, black hair flowing down her back like an endless abyss, she asks, "what's your name, honey?"

"Alastair," the boy replies. "I like your dress."

She smiles, holds out a hand to them. "Well, Alastair, you can call me--"

She pauses as they grab her hand. They're young, almost as young as the recruits she finds in the trafficking rings, in the orphanages, on the streets. The Room picks them young because they're more impressionable, closer to her main power.

With a brush of her fingers against their forehead, they jolt, dark eyes flashing with bright stars.

"Call me mother."

When Tommy opens his eyes, he knows instantly what he's seeing isn't real.

The edges to his vision are hazy and the saturation has turned warm, nothing like the cold he's used to.

Behind him, the woman laughs. "Oh, child, you were born to the ice. I rescued you from the cold."

Tommy spins and no one is there. He's standing alone in the old ballet studio at the Room. Only when he tries to move does he wobble precariously.

Attached to his pointe shoes are the handles to the knives currently stabbing into the wooden floor. He shudders. Knife-points.

"Are you the spider or are you the fly?" The woman asks and he spins again, relying on pure muscle memory to keep him upright. He knows one wrong move and he'll fall and anything less than graceful, less than flawless will lead to his demise. "Do you weave your webs or do you fall victim to your own silk?"

He swallows. "Spiders do not spin webs for their young. Their young are like birds: they abandon the mother once they grow."

The woman laughs and he spins to spot her, knives scrapping the wood below.

"Is that what you see yourself as, a bird?" She asks and only then does Tommy see her, the dark hair and hungry smile like a wolf's. "Oh, Theseus, there is no nest for you to fly from. You may be a Huntsman Spider but my web has been catching little birds like you for decades. You will be ensnared and wrapped in the finest silk until I approach to break your wings."

Tommy finds himself grinning back. "I am not breakable. I am made of marble."

The woman tilts her head. "Even diamond can shatter with the right pressure."

This is what they know: mother brings them in from the cold. She wraps them in silk sheets and offers the finest food to fill their bellies. She keeps them close, all eight eyes watching them grow, until they can spin their own webs.

She teaches them to hunt, how to lure their prey in and how to strike with nothing less than perfection.

Only when they are strong enough, old enough, does she open her arms and allow them free to the world.

There, they begin to build their radial lines. Next, once secure, the orb lines are constructed. Each spider has their own pattern, their own way of weaving a web.

Mother does not mind how the web looks, so long as prey is caught.

She smiles down at her young as they feast, as their webs grow so big, they begin to blanket the world.

“Keep pressure on the wound.” Someone is saying as Tommy breathes in pain, and exhales fire.

He does not know if he is dead or alive.

He does not know if what he sees is reality or fiction.

“If we close the wound, he’ll heal.” Another voice adds, mumbling something else but Tommy is once again swept away into the darkness.

He is suspended in silk, thin strands so strong, they lock his limbs in place as he dangles above the ground.

Tommy tries to ignore the strand looped around his throat, pulling taut every time he tries to free himself.

Before him, his brothers stand amongst the other Black Widows and Huntsman Spiders. He can just make out Niki’s blue-green eyes and dirty blonde hair.

They’re standing in rows, shoulders back, chins raised, eyes straight forward, hands behind their backs.

“Are you the spider or are you the fly?” The woman asks as she approaches, eight eyes blinking, eight legs holding her above the agents. In one fluid move, they drop to their knees, head bowed. She leans towards Tommy, jaws dripping venom. “Are the weaver or are you the web?”

Tommy struggles as she shifts away, the rows of agents rising back to their feet in a synchronised lift. In their hands, they raise their rifles at him.

“Did you know, Theseus, that the Goliath birdeater tarantula got it’s name because it’s able to hunt and eat birds?”

“No shit,” Tommy hisses and his head is jerked back by the silk as strong as steel around his throat. He chokes, body tugged taut as the other strands hold him in place.

Only when he stops struggling does the silk around his throat relax. He hurries to gulp in oxygen, blinking away the darkness.

He is not weak, not even in his dreams. He will not stumble or fall. He will prevail.

He is a Huntsman Spider and he will survive.

The woman tuts from somewhere outside of his vision range. “As I was trying to say, child, do you consider yourself a bird? Is that why you will not answer me?”

Tommy does not answer. He faintly remembers a conversation he had with her about this, about whether he was prey or a predator, whether he was hunted or a hunter.

The rifles are cocked. Tommy looks Dream in the eyes, even as his brother makes no acknowledgement that he recognises Tommy.

“You know what happens to traitors, Theseus,” she breathes and he shudders at her breath on his neck. “You know how defectors die.”

Tommy closes his eyes as the guns fire.

She is Creation, she is Life but she does not have children of her own.

That was the rule, between the two sisters, eons ago when the world was but an idea shared. Her children would be the mortals of the world and Death’s would be mortals that entered her realm.

It was a gift, a power balance. From Life’s arms to Death’s.

Then her sister had to go and fall in love with a mortal.

He was nothing, in the grand scheme of things, nothing but a spect of dust. Yet her sister fell in love, saw this mortal as more, saw this mortal as hers.

She took his life from Creation and altered it. He was no longer touched by Creation, he was reborn under Death’s gentle hands with giant black wings and golden hair.

So in response, Creation did what she did best: she made the mortals in her image. With the death of a mortal, magic was born and their feud began.

Creation and Death balanced each other perfectly and she could not kill her sister even if she wanted to.

She could, however, train her children to destroy the very fabric of the universe.

Picking the strongest of her crop, she found reality warpers and elemental manipulators and psychics. She grew her ranks, finding her children and making them better.

Then one day, during her rounds in the Red Room, she hears a baby cry and pauses.

Inside of the medical facility attached to the Room, at the end of the corridor, the birth centre sits. Widows and Spiders conceive occasionally for the optimum chance of good genes in the young.

There, being pulled away from his mother, a baby boy cries in the arms of one of the midwives. At her entrance, the baby is instantly handed over and the Widow merely blinks at her, watching silently.

“Hello,” the woman coos at the baby and he falls silent in her arms. “What should we call you?”

The baby looks up at her with big, blue eyes. He is quiet and still.

A spider waiting in a web-

There in Brighton, a boy is in the arms of his mother. She rocks him back and forth as his father throws a ball into the calm sea, a dog racing into the water.

The baby is small but giggling as his mother coos softly. The wind carries the sound out into the ocean.

They spend the day at the beach.

The baby will not remember this, or the name he was assigned at birth.

In the house that night, two shots will be fired and a Widow will gently pick up the baby as he sleeps. He will briefly stir but fall silent at her face, stilling in her arms as she removes him from his cradle, his house and to the car waiting outside.

A spider being plucked from the silk cocoon in which he grew and told to spin a web of his own-

A sharp pain burns through his chest. He hisses, the sound subdued and his eyes lazily blink open.

“Tommy?” Someone asks but everything is fuzzy, he can’t make out who’s there. “Just keep-keep breathing okay? You’re not allowed to die on me.”

He blinks but all he sees is a blur. He hisses at another stab of pain.

“Little spider,” a voice spits and his entire body shudders, mind burning. “Open your eyes and look at me.”

Even with the way his body starts to grow numb, he opens his eyes and follows the sound of the voice.

“Good,” the blurry figure praises. “I need you to-“

It feels like something is being ripped out of him and he jolts, beings to convulse. Within seconds, the pain overwhelms him and he’s succumbing to unconsciousness.

Is any of this real?

Tommy can remember fragments, bits of memory stolen slowly returning.

Her name was Hannah. The Widow he killed. He remembers the Earth that day, the way her unmarked grave grew a blackberry bush, one of the sweetest ever tasted.

Tommy could never stomach any of the berries. To him, all he could imagine was the blood on her shirt as the bullet ripped through her stomach. To him, those berries tasted like blood.

But he knew the younger recruits saw them as salvation. When hunger struck, the berries would provide sustenance.

Hannah was saving their lives from the grave.

He knows that and yet he doesn’t. The memory floats in his head and slips away just as quick.

Is any of this real?

Is he awake or dreaming?

Is he dead?

Was he ever alive?

“Are you the spider or are you the fly?” His mother asks as he sits at the dining table, math homework before him. Outside, he can hear his brother talking to some of his friends from school.

“I don’t like spiders,” he replies, scrunching up his nose. “They’re creepy.”

She laughs, reaches a hand out to grip his cheek. “You didn’t answer my question, sweetheart.”

He thinks, leaning his cheek into her hand. “Neither,” he settles on. “I don’t want to be an insect.”

Her smile is soft-

No. That’s not right.

“Are you the spider or are you the fly?” The woman asks as he sits in the chair, strapped down, electrodes on his temples.

“The boy with the broom, destroying the web,” he hisses and she laughs at him, the sound cruel.

“Oh, child,” she taps his nose and he snaps at her hand. “You need to watch that tongue of yours before I cut it out.”

“Do it then,” he snarls and before he can blink, his body is writhing with electricity. It burns through his nerves until he’s left shaking and panting, eyes rolling back into his skull.

A hand grips his cheek, nails digging into his skin, drawing blood. “You have so much potential, Theseus. Surviving despite the odds. But that attitude of yours? No, that can’t do.”

She leans down as he’s zapped again. His body locks, tense as he sputters. Her face inches from his, Tommy spits. She doesn’t even blink.

“You’re a fly, now, but soon, you’ll be my greatest spider.”

All he remembers next is pain.

When she first sees the child, she does not think much of him. His powers have yet to manifest but she can sense the strength of them like a brand on his neck.

Well, he is branded like the rest of the recruits. When they reach five, after their first successful killing, they have a red circle tattooed behind their ear. Property of the Red Room.

He is successful in his killing, he gains the mark of the Room but she does not fully notice him.

Not until he grows stronger and stronger. Not until she watches him gain those red wings. Only then does she start to pay more attention to him.

She watches from the sidelines as he bonds with the older agents and nearly laughs. She does not interfere though, because they appear to make this boy fight for longer, fight harder.

He survives, keeps surviving.

Her creation, her weapon. That's when she chooses him.

There is a moment when she sits up from where she's sat in a hospital, collecting the souls of a poor man and his child who died in a car crash.

She misses her husband and her children but her work never stops. Soon, when there is a moment of rest, she will go back to her family.

But the days are long and Death, unfortunately, waits for no one. It is, like she is, inevitable.

Still, as she coaxes the child into her arms with a smile, she feels a ripple. One that she should not feel.

An immortal's heart is stopping.

For a moment as she allows the child to pass over calmly, all she can think is that it's her husband. It's not possible, he cannot die without her say but she can feel it.

She thinks of the similar instances as she races towards the source, of when she felt an immortal die. Most of them looked so young even if their souls had wear. Most of them refused to acknowledge her as they passed over, relief on their faces.

And there, in a cargo plane, a boy writhes on the ground, bright, blood red wings flattened beneath him as a bullet is plucked from his chest. She watches as his heart stops, as he appears before her, eyes closed and wings limp.

She reaches out a hand, something familiar about him, but he's gone before she can blink.

One of the men slams a hand onto his chest and the boy's heart begins to beat.

She stands there, confused.

Much like the others she's allowed through her domain, something is very familiar about him. He burns with life, like the others had, something bright and burning and-

The boy latches onto one of the men, a low chirping in his throat and she knows where she last saw that.

Back when she met her husband and her sister screamed vitriol at her, filled with rage and confusion and betrayal. Her sister, Life. Her sister, Creation.

Are these her children?

She swallows and turns, heading towards when Life burns brightest. She must speak with her sister.

Consciousness comes to him slowly. He blinks his eyes open and is met with someone running their hands over his wings. He thinks he should tense but the movement is soothing and he sighs.

“Hello, sleepy-head,” Dream murmurs and Tommy looks at him from where his head is resting on Dream’s chest.

Dream’s green eyes are less vibrant and he looks almost concerned. Tommy can’t help but mutter, “you look like shit.”

Dream snorts. “Coming from you.”

“What the fuck is happening?” He slurs and someone over his shoulder snorts.

“You’re a baby bird,” Ssnap says. “We’re trying to treat you for a literal chest wound and you’re chirping your head off the minute we stop touching you.”

Tommy scrunches his face up. “That’s a lie, snipsnap.”

“Dream?” George says from behind Tommy and he watches as Dream slowly pulls away.

It isn’t until Dream goes to leave does the distressed chirp escape his mouth. Tommy stills, trying to swallow as more rise in panic.

Dream shifts back and the noises stop. Tommy groans, dropping his head onto Dream’s shoulder.

“Fuck’s sake,” he hisses and George laughs from behind him.

“Here’s the plan,” George speaks. “We’re going to stay here - the agents gave us an extra day - until we know you’re fit enough to travel-“

“Then what?” Tommy whispers. “I can’t go back to L’Manberg and we don’t have access to Kristin. We can’t kill the woman.”

A hand smooths out some of his feathers and he instantly quietens. Ssnap giggles in the corner. Tommy flips him off without looking.

“If you’d let me finish,” George sighs. “We’ve come up with an idea. With the vials, to preserve as many as possible, we’ll break one for the agents here and now.”

George pauses and Tommy instantly tenses, knowing that a silence like that is never good. He finally looks up from Dream’s chest and realises he’s in Dream’s Saint Petersburg safe house.

Ssnap is sitting on the kitchen counter, coffee in hand while George sits beside the bed, one hand petting Tommy’s wings as he gazes out into the street. Snow, soft and light, falls from the sky.

Tommy swallows. "We're in Russia."

"Yes," George replies. "You were out of it for most of the journey over."

Tommy stares at him, even as the man doesn't look back. "My programming was failing, I think. I was remembering things or- or maybe I was dreaming. I- it was like being in the chair, not knowing what is real and what's not."

That gets George to look back and Tommy ends up receiving three identical sad looks.

Tommy rolls his eyes. "Fuck off. What- are we just going to go back to the Room and try and kill Eret?"

Their silence is telling. Tommy opens his mouth to start shouting but Sarnap raises his hand to stop him. "Tommy," he starts, "we can't just run for our entire lives. We have a shot now that the woman seems to be gone. You break a vial - considering you're not affected by Eret - and we kill them."

"You make that sound easy," Tommy replies, unsure.

"Stop being negative," George parrots him from a couple of days ago and Tommy rolls his eyes.

He sits up, making sure he's gripping Dream's hand so that he doesn't start chirping. "So," he says, feeling a sharp pulling sensation. "Ow, fuck."

He looks down and there, on his chest, a pink circle of freshly healed skin lays. There is little pain - his body is healing - and so he ignores it.

Dream shifts, pushing himself upright and leans his back against the wall. "Yes, Tommy?"

"So," Tommy tries again. "We're going to go back to the very place we're running from and try to kill our collective Handler whose power is making it extremely fucking hard to kill them."

"Yes," all three reply and Tommy sighs, stretching his wings out. Red feathers push out and Tommy sees that they've been preened in his sleep, his back no longer aching.

He smiles at the sight of them. He caught a sight when Phil called them out: the way they were ruined and bloody, aching and hurting. Now, they're back to being strong.

"Cool," he replies, wings flexing back to his body and curling up into a high arch. "Thanks for sorting my wings out and- and stopping me from dying."

"Well," Dream murmurs, lifting the hand not occupied by Tommy's to prod at his hair. "I don't think we did."

"What?" Tommy asks as Sarnap jumps from the counter and hands him a polished dagger. Staring into the reflective surface, Tommy notes that a long strip of previously blond hair is now bone white. "Oh."

“Someone’s looking out for you,” Sapnap breathes and Tommy stares at himself with wide eyes.

He looks older than he did when he last looked in a mirror and believed he was hallucinating Dream. There are bags under his eyes that look like bruises, his skin is deathly pale and a new coldness is in his blue eyes, reflecting the current snowy skies of Russia.

“Fuck it,” Tommy breathes. “Let’s take down the Room.”

Chapter End Notes

HES ALIVE!!!!

Also we’re heading back to the Red Room!

My discord: <https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

Also my Twitter (that I totally didn’t create just for interacting with DSMP enthusiasts, fight me): @spooky_serpent

Also my tumblr: @spookyserpent

Thank you so much for your support! Take care of yourselves! <3

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Some bonding, some explanations!

Also, Tundra is the one to blame for the DNF joke...

TW// blood and injury, violence, mention of child death (brief), weaponry, past brainwashing, past abuse, mental health discussions, brief mention of alcoholism, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil really doesn't know what he expected to happen but this wasn't it.

Standing in the ruined remains of the industrial park, next to his warehouse, he lets himself stare out at the carnage and breathe in a deep sigh. Blood coats the disrupted soil and cracked tarmac. Mostly Tommy's blood.

Phil only feels slightly guilty about that. He'd felt something tugging him towards Theseus, all those weeks ago on that roof, something that made him not instantly try and kill the vigilante.

Then it was the way he reacted when Phil chirped, the way he seemed to mirror Phil's uncomfortable shoulder rolling after hiding wings. Phil didn't actually expect for Tommy to collapse and for wings to sprout from his back: the same wings he described as the boy he killed as having.

Post-mortem power absorption. God, isn't that terrifying.

And yet-

And yet, apart from shooting Schlatt with an almost dazed look to his eyes, Tommy never made any indication to kill any of them.

The other ones, the Huntsman Spiders and Black Widows, only appeared when everyone looked to Tommy. They were protective of him, defending him.

"His brothers," Wilbur says, probably seeing the memories Phil is flicking through. He's rubbing his jaw, a black eye forming. "They were his brothers."

“They’re all as feral as he is,” Techno drawls, holding his arm as a long, thin cut heals. Blood drips from his face and his stomach. At Phil’s stare he rolls his crimson eyes. “I’m good. Just a couple of bullets and cuts.”

Wilbur opens his mouth, drops his voice low, “just a couple bullet wounds, you know how it is-“

Techno reaches a hand out and smacks him.

The red doors open and Ponk sticks his head out, scanning the area with wide eyes, face hidden by his mask. “Uh,” he says, “this all looks horrible.”

Totem - Foolish - laughs. “That’s an understatement.”

Ponk quickly scans over Phil, who waves him away. “We’re good,” he says. “Ranboo and Tubbo?”

Ponk waves him off, stepping out. “They’re fine. We heard the noise but Ranboo convinced Tubbo to stay underground by telling him he couldn’t hack into the Venezuelan government.”

Phil snorts, relief shown in the way his wings drop. They’re safe. Ponk turns to where Sam is groaning on the ground.

Drista spawns in whatever Ponk asks for while Puffy’s eyes burn with tears as she rips pieces of metal from her arms. Phil watches as she heals herself through her probability reality warping.

Phil has always thought being able to affect probabilities was intriguing. His power has always been tied with death whereas Puffy can make something seemingly impossible happen.

Phil stands and listens as Ponk explains injuries.

Ant has been shot and has a leg broken. Fundy’s arm is broken and he has metal embedded in his thigh. Drista has burning across her forearms where she blocked some of the explosions one of the Widows could generate.

Foolish has been shot but his own body is healing quicker, using the rain to energise him. With a quick once over from Ponk, Sam looks mostly unscathed apart from the red staining his shoulder and ribs.

Bad has blood dripping from his chest and arms but he’s unbothered by it as Skeppy - untouched: bullets always ricochet off diamond - and him stare at Schlatt, who’s sitting up, grin to his lips.

“I think I hit one of them!” He says, gun hanging limply from his hands. He reaches into one of his pockets, pulls a flask and takes a victory sip. Or five.

“I’m pretty sure you were aiming for me,” Wilbur says, voice sweet but the smile accompanying it is strained.

“Was I?” Schlatt asks with a furrow of his brow, taking another sip. “Bloodloss fucking sucks.”

Phil raises his eyebrows at the man as Ponk helps up with Bad’s help. Something is off about Schlatt, something that makes Phil’s wings twitch and curl close to his body.

“Language,” Bad mumbles and Phil pulls his gaze from Schlatt’s retreating form.

Jack sits beside Niki, her gaze somewhat dazed. There’s no obvious injury and she’s quiet when Phil drops to a crouch in front of her.

“Do you know why he would shoot like that without provocation?”

She shakes her head, pink hair falling from her ponytail. “I- I don’t know. I don’t- I’m sorry but my memory’s a little hazy.”

“Of ten minutes ago?” Phil asks, voice soft even as his wings twitch in confusion.

“I don’t know,” she repeats, finally lifts her head to meet his gaze. “Where’d they go? What happened?”

“Tommy collapsed - it might be the wings - but we couldn’t really see anything what with all of the metal flying everywhere.” Phil gestures to the ruined remains of his warehouse that only holds the wooden doors and the bare steel structure. “After that, they all went through this portal.”

“Leslie,” Niki breathes. “Leslie can generate portals and forcefields. Tina can control metal.”

“That’s what happened,” he says and she nods.

“I don’t-“ Niki starts to shake, eyes wide and panicked. “Phil, I don’t remember.”

“Did you hit your head?” Jack breathes, hand reaching to grip hers. “I didn’t see anything like that happen.”

“I don’t know,” she hisses and her accent shifts slightly before she corrects it. “Why can’t I-“

Jack gently nudges Phil aside and says, “I’m real, you’re real. You’re in L’Manberg, specifically the Badlands district, America. Your name is Niki. My name is-“

“Jack,” she replies, eyes clearer. “Thank you.”

“Always,” he replies with a smile as Puffy wanders over. There’s blood in her white hair and an odd look to her eye.

She looks to Niki, who smiles a reassuring smile up at her. “I’m good. You?”

Puffy shrugs. “Physically, yes. Mentally... I remember that blond man. He didn’t have the scar when I last saw him, though.”

“When?” Phil asks, rising from his crouch.

“After Alyssa, the babysitter, left and Drista mentioned a man lurking around the house. We spoke, once, briefly.”

“Why are we all involved with these agents?” Techno says, flexing his fingers out. “Quackity and Karl with this Nick. Then we have Niki. Then Tommy. Who else?”

“Niki?” Puffy whispers, eyes darting to her. “What do you mean?”

Niki sighs and Techno wilts, muttering a quiet apology. Niki waves him off and tilts her head to the side, shifts her hair from her ear. There, a red circle is tattooed onto her skin. “I haven’t been totally honest with you.”

With help from Jack, Niki gently grabs Puffy’s hand and leads her away, talking in hushed tones.

They all turn away, giving them couple privacy as Schlatt is led towards his car. Ponk is murmuring so low that Phil can only make out the word ‘hospital’.

Sam pulls a phone from his pocket and dials. It takes a while for the line to connect but when it does, it’s obvious who he’s calling and why.

“Black hair, dark eyes that look like they have flames in them, stocky but fit?” Sam rattles off.

There’s silence and then from the phone, “you saw him?”

“He packs a punch,” Sam says with a groan. “You never told me he had fire powers, Q.”

“That’s because I didn’t fucking know, did I?” Quackity hisses down the line. “Nick- Sapnap never told us any of this.”

“Is he okay?” Karl asks, voice soft and Sam sighs.

“I mean-“ Sam pauses and then swallows. “Tommy shot Schlatt and they all appeared like a swarm of deadly assassins.”

“They did seem to know how to pick through us,” Wilbur comments, idly, finger tapping his chin. “Sapnap immediately honed in on Sam and his explosions like he knew-“

“Because we do,” Niki speaks up from where she’s snuck up on them. Puffy is nowhere in sight. “They teach us about the main Heroes and Villains in each continent in case we come up against them. It looks fluid, rehearsed because it is.”

“Niki,” Quackity breathes from the line. “Why do you say that like you know?”

Niki snorts, eyes tired. “Tommy is a Huntsman Spider, yes but I’m a Black Widow.”

“What the fuck?” Quackity breathes and she rubs a hand across her face.

“Look, we can all have a nice discussion about this but Tommy is with them now. They’ll either disperse and try to run or they’ll head back to the Room to destroy it permanently.” She briefly meets Phil’s gaze. “Not like they can without Kristin’s help, supposedly.”

“I can’t contact her,” Phil stresses. “You don’t think I would if I could?”

“Woah, what happens if they go back?” Quackity asks and Niki’s face does something complicated as she looks to Jack.

“Then either they destroy it,” she says, slowly, “or they don’t.”

“And if they don’t?” Phil asks, already sensing where this is going.

Niki’s eyes are full of pain as she says, “then they’ll be agents again and we’re all at risk.”

Theseus stands in the snow, shaking. Blood pools from his back as wings tear through his skin. He thinks he may be dying of blood loss. He doesn’t know.

He will be shot like the boy he shot and killed for these wings. He cannot keep them out.

Snow falls into his hair, down his back, soothing the burning of his spine.

Theseus will not die here, he will not have his wings curled around him as he’s forced into an unmarked grave.

George had whispered to him as his wings grew in, “you can force them in, I’ve seen it happen.”

So Theseus stands in the snow and screams. He will survive.

He imagines the wings curving and pulling back, images skin curling over and bone shifting into place. He screams until his voice is hoarse and only then, does he blink past the flood of tears to find his balance steady. The wings are no longer out.

From the sidelines, Eret watches with a shocked gaze. “You cannot scream everytime you put them away,” they say and Theseus nods. “We’ll do further tests.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Theseus?” Eret stops him from walking back to his dorm to take a much needed shower. “I’m impressed.”

The next day when Theseus walks past George, it looks like he’s impressed too.

Tommy spends the day curled up by one of their sides to stop the incessant chirping. It’s awkward and annoying but they indulge him, not mentioning it.

Especially not when Heatwaves by Glass Animals comes on the radio they have in the corner and Dream vaults the entire counter and couch to switch channels while George falls silent and Sapnap laughs himself to a coughing fit.

George ends up telling him what happened, considering the memory is faint. He shot Schlatt - someone they all find familiar but don't know why - and took a bullet for Wilbur. A bullet shot from Schlatt's gun. Leslie was the one to portal them away.

Tommy can see the way they all wince over that. Tommy willingly putting himself in harms way for someone that he's only known for a short amount of time.

Dream calls the other agents up when he begins to cook, Sapnap watching with an eagle's eye while George types away on his laptop. Tommy's feet are in his lap, George's hand on his ankle as he lays on his front, wings flexing and fluttering.

They enter at a leisurely pace, scanning the area with an assassin's eye. Tommy watches, content to trust his brothers with his safety.

It isn't until the door has shut that Sapnap flips a vial from his pocket and smashes it on the table. A red mist erupts into the air, Tommy's wings curling tighter around him as the agents cough and freeze.

"What the hell was that?" Toast hisses, hand rubbing at his face.

"Eret's control," Corpse whispers, blinking down at his hands. "I can't feel it--"

They all look between each other, blinking that haze from their mind. Tommy doesn't know what they're experiencing. He was never under Eret's control, doesn't know what it feels like to be free of that.

"The plan," Dream says, "is simple."

Tommy stays quiet as they discuss, content to allow his body to heal. His wings are sore and his chest wound is nothing but a dull ache.

Here, in his home country, amongst the other survivors, the other agents, he feels himself relax. This is normal. This reminds him of the Room, when they would sit and talk out the mission, planning entrances and exits, weapons and possible collateral damage.

"Anyone want to back out?" Sapnap asks and all of them look at each other before shaking their heads.

"None of us are truly free if the rest of us are locked in cages," Brooke murmurs, tying her blonde hair up in a ponytail.

Minx snorts, eyes narrowing playfully. "You mean free from the web?"

"When do we go?" Jack asks, bouncing on his heels. "I'm ready to see Eret's head on a fucking pike."

“We’re waiting on Tommy,” George says and proves his point by removing his hand from Tommy’s skin, which leaves Tommy instantly chirping in distress.

“Oh,” Rae says and then her face shifts into one of joy. “Baby bird.”

“I will cut you,” Tommy hisses but the effect is lessened when George removes his hand and Tommy’s words blur into a chirp.

“How long do you think you’ll be like this?” Sykunno asks, tucked under Corpse’s arm, hand holding Tina’s.

Tommy shrugs, feathers ruffling as his wings shift. “Don’t know,” he says, dropping his head back to his arms.

So for a couple of hours, the agents of the Red Room mill around Dream’s safe house.

Jack takes up throwing daggers at the wall, Tina using her ability to throw them back to him. Minx sits by Tommy’s head, chatting idly to George while Toast and Dream go over the plan. From the other couch, Brooke braids Leslie’s hair from her face. Sykunno, Rae and Corpse huddle around the table, talking in low tones as Sappnap makes his way over, running warm hands through Tommy’s feathers.

It’s soothing, oddly relaxing. Tommy finds himself tuning out their conversations, content to lay and listen.

Well, until he gets bored.

It’s something the Room would slap out of him - a lack of patience is a lesson well learned - but he’s not there. He’s in Dream’s apartment. He’s safe here.

“Minx,” he asks, tilting his head to see her. “How’d you know to go after Wilbur?”

She rolls her eyes. “You weren’t paying attention to your surroundings. It was almost too easy to stalk you. I’ve been watching for awhile. It was either him or the bee-boy but he wasn’t at the casino at the same time you were.”

He hums, considering how he missed such a threat on his tail. “He was my friend.”

Something flashes in her eyes but she’s quick to school her features. “Nikita was mine but they still sent me to kill her.”

From the dinner table, Corpse adds, “there was a boy in my class. I called him Reeth. He died to save me. He was my friend.”

There’s a silence as they all add people, some from their classes, some from missions too long.

“They sent me to kidnap my sister,” Dream whispers. “My biological sister. I- after what Alyssa said about L’Manberg, and after I saw the Captain for the first time, I remembered

finding her name in my file when I was a recruit. They kept trying to erase her. The woman was worried I'd somehow remember that she was my mother, that I had a family back home."

"If they found out about Karl and Q, I'm pretty sure I'd have to kill them." Sapnap mumbles after Tommy spends seconds blinking at Dream.

Puffy is Dream's mother. That's going to make family dinners interesting.

Toast shifts his seat. "A month before you three left, they used Ludwig as target practice after he tried to run. None of us are allowed to have friends--"

"Friendship is complacency and complacency is death." They all day, the phrase so ingrained in them.

"And you were pretty complacent," Minx murmurs and Tommy narrows his eyes. He shifts up, wings curling at his back to make room.

"So what?" He hisses, suddenly angry. "It's bullshit. All of it is bullshit. I was free, Minx. Free. I got to make my own choices. What does it matter if I'm not focusing on everything all the time? Wil was my friend and if you had killed him, I would've gladly killed you."

He looks away from her shocked face, eyes burning. He turns to Corpse, who looks almost panicked to be at the centre of Tommy's attention.

"Your friend, what was he like? Why did he die?"

Corpse shifts. "Well, I called him Reeth because of his ribs that he used as teeth--"

Tommy, Tina, Brooke and Sapnap all look between themselves. Tina interrupts, "wait, he was real?"

Corpse sighs, running a hand through his curly hair. "Yeah. He was. I just remember the way he tore through the guards. He fought until he couldn't anymore him. It took eight bullets for him to fall."

"But why did he die?" Tommy stresses and Corpse looks up, dark eyes intense.

"Another boy was going to kill him," he says with a shrug. "We're allowed to kill each other but we both knew we'd be punished. Reeth decided to have his power manifest then, tried to take down as many recruits and guards as possible."

Tommy nods, points at Minx. "So all Reeth - still a fucking weird name, by the way - did to deserve to die was fight back."

"Those are the rules," Leslie comments, quietly, confused. "We're a spider in a web. We're not suppose to destroy the silk."

"No, that's a fly being trapped, primed for slaughter." Tommy hits back. "None of us are spiders, if we're going with that shitty analogy, we're trapped in the silk, we're flies."

Jack rolls his eyes. "I'd just like to say that I'm not, and never have been, a fly."

"You killed Felix," George says, dark eyes burning. "I remember your hand shaking."

Jack's eyes harden. "He was a traitor--"

"He was your friend," George spits back, vicious. "We all had them and most of them died by our own hands."

For a moment, they're all silent, studying one another. Tommy is the youngest here, he doesn't know what they've seen, what they've been through. Jack is the oldest and Tommy doesn't know how many recruits he's seen enter through the doors and never leave.

There's a reason George is so cold and calculating, hiding any emotion he feels.

He looks between their faces and if asked, many people would assume they were all in their early twenties. They don't look old, they have no wrinkles and apart from a few scars that haven't healed - Dream's facial one, Corpse's burns, a long jagged gash down the side of Minx's neck - they look almost frozen in time.

"I should've died," Tommy whispers, looking at Dream, then Sapnap, and then George. "You three saved my life."

"What do you mean?" Sykunno asks, tilting his head. "I thought you were going to be the best."

Dream rolls his eyes as Rae coughs to hide her laugh. Minx doesn't try, her smirk is obvious even as Tina leans over to hit her, playfully.

Tommy flexes his wings out. "These are a fucking pain."

"Because of balancing?" Brooke asks, playing with the ends of her hair.

Tommy shakes his head but Toast is quick to speak before he can. "The chirping?"

"I thought that was just because you're an adorable baby bird--" Rae begins and Tommy is proud to say his first instinct is to grab the pen from the coffee table and throw it straight at her.

It's Rae, so of course she catches it centimetres from her eye.

"Birds need flock," Tommy states as Rae drops the pen. "The boy I killed for these, sure he wasn't able to fight as well, but he had no connections. That's why he tried to fly away. That instinct to find family seemed to be stronger than Eret's abilities."

"They kept you sane," Corpse mutters and Tommy shrugs.

"Yeah and normally, that wouldn't be allowed. I'd be made to kill them--"

"You did shoot me," Dream says with a raised eyebrow.

“Under Eret’s orders!” Tommy snaps. “And it was a fucking blank!”

“And you bit me- look! The scar!” Sapnap holds up his hand.

George pats Tommy’s head as he splutters at Sapnap. “You’ve never done anything like that to me, so well done.”

“But they needed you alive,” Jack interrupts them before they dissolve into an argument. “So they allowed it.”

“Which makes them hypocrites,” Rae whispers, voice hard.

“Yeah,” Tommy agree, flopping back to his front. “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you idiots.”

George pinches his ankle. Tommy kicks him in retaliation.

Corpse frowns at him and says, wiggling his fingers, “sorry about the whole-“

Tommy shrugs. “I know you grabbed me to get me out and I know you also grabbed me as a precaution to control me but your powers have never worked on me before.”

“That’s mostly if you’re paying attention, though,” Sapnap mumbles and Tommy looks to Corpse.

“I’m paying attention now.”

Corpse nods, leans back. “I don’t want to control you,” he says, calmly. “I don’t want to control anyone.”

Rae sends Tommy a look, reminiscent of the one back in Budapest. “We’ll just have to try and be free.”

For a second, they all look between each other. Widows and Spiders alike. The best in their classes.

Twenty-eight to one.

The silence is only broken when Sykunno asks, “what’s for dinner?”

Chapter End Notes

They’re planning ;)

My discord: <https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

My Tumblr: @spookyserpent

My Twitter: @spooky_serpent

^ I'll be posting some preview, no context spoilers for new chapters on my Twitter ;)

I hope you're all taking care of yourselves!! Thank you all for the support!! <3

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

And so it begins...

Part 2 should be up on Friday :)

TW// past brainwashing, past abuse, blood and injury, children getting hurt, death, gore and body horror, violence, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He is not Theseus in Berlin. He is Max.

A Handler drops him off at the edge of town and tells him he has an hour. Max does what he's trained to do.

He hunts.

It is one of his first missions, he is barely seven yet he knows what's at stake, he knows what has to be done. So he makes his way to the apartment block he's been scoping out for a month.

He approaches the doors and buzzes the button for the third floor, apartment twelve. It takes a minute before the line connects.

"Yes?" An old woman asks in German.

"Mrs Fischer," Max greets in German. "I'm sorry but I forgot Klaus' keys-"

"Oh, no need, I'll buzz you in."

Minutes later, Max slips into Klaus' apartment. He is not yet home from school and Max takes this opportunity to open the window. He climbs out and up the drainpipe to the apartment above.

Slipping his knife out, he slowly enters through the window that's always open because of the cigarette smoke.

This apartment block is swarming with members of the government and this is the only way in, undetected. Max has to make it personal. This has to be a warning. This is the mission.

Once in, he follows the sound of a woman humming. Her wife is at work.

Max finds her in the kitchen. He hurdles the kitchen counter, catches her when she looks away and slits her throat.

In seconds, she's dead. Max cuts off her finger and leaves it next to the body. He makes sure to step over the pool of blood, checking to make sure no blood evidence is on him.

In less than two minutes, he's leaving Klaus' apartment. On the street, he finds a sleek black car and approaches it.

He's not Max when he's sitting in the car, driving through the snow of Russia.

He's Theseus.

Fourteen hours later, Tommy is sitting in a familiar sleek, black car. Dream, George, Sapnap and Corpse sit in the limousine with him, all sitting upright, chins held high, backs straight.

Tommy's wings have retreated to his back with little hassle and in his hoodie pocket, the vial sits. The guards that picked them up at the airport didn't pat them down: why would they? Tommy may have defected but with Corpse with them, he's their alibi. He could have them all under his control.

So they sit in silence in the car, waiting for the inevitable.

It's cold but Tommy welcomes the chill. This was his home, his country of origin, the place of his growth.

An hour turns into two before they hit the plains of pure snow. Acres span with frozen soil and fluttering snowflakes and Tommy knows they're not returning to the facility Tommy blew up - they've showed him the floorplans, he knows the ins and outs - but it's still strange to be so far out.

A concrete structure awaits them, barbed wire littering the exterior with guard towers. Tommy frowns at the sight and Dream covers his grin with a hand.

The car rolls forward through the double gates and Tommy immediately schools his features, half a second behind Dream. They slow to a stop and Tommy waits, focuses his attention on Corpse.

He may not be influenced by Corpse but he would be compliant if his brothers were under Corpse's control.

The door is opened by one of the guards and Corpse is the one to step out first, the other three mimicking him perfectly. Tommy makes a show of it, like he did at the airport, rushing to follow, to stand beside a lifeless Dream. One of the guards - the taller one - snickers and he sends him a withering glare as he huddles close to Dream.

All part of the entertainment to draw attention away from the fact they're clearly not being led by Corpse.

They trained them for this. Are they really surprised to be on the receiving end?

Corpse follows the guards through the concrete doors and Tommy waits for the signal.

They pass another set of doors - the entire facility is concrete and coldness and god, Tommy hates it - before Corpse grabs the guard's wrist, tugging him back. He uses his other hand to smash the guard's face into the wall.

George also moves from the back of the group, swiping the other guard's legs out from under him and snapping his neck. With steady hands, he picks up the guns from the guard's holsters.

Tommy follows while the other two grin. "This is going to be fun," Sapnap says, eyes alight with fire.

Under their feet, the concrete shifts. Dream mirrors his grin. "Hell yeah."

They hear the footsteps before they see the guards and Corpse cracks his neck. "For Reeth," he says, dark eyes burning, fists clenched at his sides. "For Reeth."

Then, like the way they were all trained, they rain hell down on the guards.

George picks them off with single hits while Corpse seems to have a personal vendetta. He snaps their necks, breaks their arms and legs, curls around them and pushes them down like the spider he is.

In the end, Tommy barely has to kill one with the way Corpse makes his way through them. There's only one for him to grab and in a move learnt from the widows, he flips himself onto the guard's shoulders, tightens his legs and twists until he hears a snap. Landing upright, the guard crumbles to the ground.

All that's left is a pile of bodies.

Tommy remembers the time he thought the guards were untouchable, impossible to kill.

Once there's quiet bar Corpse's sigh at the sight of the bodies, they continue. They wind around the corridors, picking off the few guards there. They pass training rooms and ballet studios and dorms.

The dorms are empty but it is the middle of the day. The children should be either training or eating lunch.

They round a corner and Tommy knows the cameras are watching them. It's thrilling, to be able to do this, to be able to walk through the Room and destroy it.

However, the closer in they get, the more Eret's ability seems to be concentrated.

Tommy may not be able to feel it but he knows powers are not allowed once in the facility. He can feel the way his body loses its superior senses, the way he's glad his wings are hidden.

He watches as Sapnap starts to lose his fire, as Dream can no longer make the ground shift under their feet.

Tommy may not be affected by Eret's power but he is affected by the indoctrination of his childhood that told him, unless permitted by a Handler, to never use his abilities. Some rules are harder to break than others.

Despite the loss of their abilities, they still make their way through the facility rather easily. George mostly headshots any guards while Tommy makes sure to keep everyone off their tail.

They approach a large door with a key panel. Dream shoots the guards waiting by the door and types in the number. With weapons raised, they file in, only to be met with a strange sight.

Eret sits behind their desk, dressed as regally as ever, sipping tea from a China cup.

"Theseus," they coo, grinning wide with their lips and white eyes. "You've finally wandered back to your web."

Tommy grins back, hand closing around the red vial. "Since this organisation fucking loves their spider metaphors, here's one for you, you bastard: did you know that orb weaver spiders tear down their own webs?"

Before Eret has the chance to reply, Tommy pulls the vial from his pocket and smashes it. Red gas fills the air and they all cough, shaking their heads as they inhale the gas.

Eret's power is now void. They're free.

"Who wants the honours?" Tommy smirks, knowing he can't pull the trigger after his days in the chair, and three guns cock at the same time.

Theseus' head snaps to the side, blood dripping from his split lip. His hands are tied behind him, simple zip ties and he'd really be more impressed if they didn't pick the dirty, abandoned building on the outskirts of town.

At least he's still in Russia. Small mercies. The trek back will be easy enough.

"I never realised the Room's assets could be so stupid," Oleg breathes in Russian, gripping Theseus' hair to stare into his eyes. His breath reeks of fish.

"What's the Room?" Theseus replies and gets a punch for his troubles. He shakes his head from the daze and says, "your brother employed me-"

"No, no," Oleg says with a mocking frown. "My brother would send someone competent. Not a child."

Theseus rolls his eyes. “There’s no shadow organisation, Oleg. There’s no such thing as children being turned into killers-“

A slap has Theseus sighing through his nose, cheek stinging.

“Then explain why my daughter saw a ballerina three days before she died?” Oleg hisses. “We’ve all heard the rumours of killer ballerinas-“

“I’m not a fan of ballet,” Theseus interrupts and gets an uppercut for his snide comment. He laughs through the hit, blood spilling onto the concrete below.

“Look, kid, I know the Red Room exists,” he hisses. “I know about Eret, I know about the guard routines and the fucking shooting range out back.”

Theseus raises his eyebrows, looks behind the man to the men at his sides, waiting for this interrogation to be over. “I think your boss is undergoing a bit of psychosis.”

A slap. Theseus sighs. This is getting repetitive.

“They believe me,” he snarls. “I have proof. I have documents about all of your organisations hits-“

“In a little safe under your desk?” Theseus mocks in a high voice and the man snaps a hand out, gripping his chin. So that means they’re definitely in a safe under a desk.

“I will burn your organisation to the ground.”

Theseus grins. “More intelligent people have tried,” he spits and snaps his hands out of the zip ties - so easy to break when close to the skin.

Slamming his forehead onto Oleg’s nose, Theseus darts up. Catching the gun swinging in his direction from one of Oleg’s bodyguards, he snaps it from his hands and shoots him in the chest.

An arm wraps around his waist and he throws himself up and then pushes himself down. The man flips over his shoulders and Theseus raises the gun, shoots him once, cleanly, in the head.

He turns to where Oleg is staggering away, blood staining his teeth, nose broken. His eyes are wide with panic and fear.

Theseus cocks his head. “Are you going to piss yourself? I won’t judge. It’s the body’s natural reaction to fear, something about dissuading predators.”

Oleg swallows. “You’re one of them, aren’t you?”

Theseus grins. “Thank you for your cooperation.”

He raises his arm, shoots.

Chapter End Notes

They're back and they're ready to incite chaos ;)

My discord: <https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

My Tumblr: @spookyserpent

My Twitter: @spooky_serpent

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I hope you're all taking care of yourselves!! Thank you all for the comments, kudos and interactions!! <3

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

... this one isn't going to be fun :)

TW// implications of rape and pedophilia (none shown), past child abuse, past child death, violence, gore, brainwashing, triggering phrases, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The punishments of the Room can be kind or cruel. Kind in being simplistic or quick; cruel in simply being cruel.

Sapnap tends to be quick. A simple broken nose, a slap. He finds no pleasure in long-winded torture and so Theseus never has to worry about some psychological punishment. It's quick and when it's done, it's done.

George tends to dip into the psychological while also being simplistic. He doesn't care about Theseus in the beginning, doesn't worry if he's being too harsh. His punishments revolve around repeating trigger phrases until they're all Theseus knows, or if he's done something truly displeasing, a week in the isolation room. Sensory deprivation at its finest.

Most teachers deliver quick hits and brutal beatings. Some of the teachers are more sadistic, preferring to watch the students break under the pain.

The survivors are always the ones that don't break.

Then there's Dream.

It's not that Dream is particularly brutal. It's more that Dream draws it out. Theseus doesn't realise it's because he's trying to keep him alive. Not in the beginning.

Dream hits hard. He coos to Theseus about being his little spider while breaking a finger or pulling his hair. It's a knife to the ribs and a hand at his throat.

Dream isn't sadistic but he draws it out. Beatings mixed with trigger phrases. Soft words paired with cruel hands until Theseus learns to simply obey.

It's less painful if he does what he's told.

His nose doesn't get as broken and he gets more hair ruffles, more brief side-hugs.

Theseus learns through his punishments that if he's good, if he does what he's told, he gets brief moments of affection. Like Pavlov's dog salivating at the bell, Theseus learns quick what behaviour is acceptable.

He thinks, in some ways, Dream cared about the bi-coloured boy lost to the Siberian snow. Some of the agents pick favourites and Theseus' class knows Dream picked that boy first. Theseus lived and the boy didn't and Dream feels angry about that.

In the end it doesn't matter, Theseus survives.

Eret merely blinks at them, even if they cannot see. "Shoot me then," they sing, mocking, sarcastic. "I'm waiting."

They all blink at them, no one pulling any trigger. Dream is the first one to hiss, "what's happening?"

Eret sips their tea. "After Theseus was able to resist, you didn't think I'd ignore that you all might have that same chance. You're too close, should've tried long distance, or maybe Theseus' bombs."

Oh. Tommy freezes, dread in his stomach. Eret made it so that Tommy could never pull a trigger, never kill them. Now, his brothers, the other agents can only harm Eret if they distance themselves. A sniper shot, a fire, a bomb.

Too close, and just like the presence of being here has them losing their abilities, they're unable to kill Eret.

"You've become paranoid," Dream hisses and Eret laughs, a low, haunting laugh.

"And you've become soft."

Dream snarls as George straightens, arm snapping out to stop him from stepping forward. Sapnap is practically vibrating where he stands, flames in his eyes but none flicking in his hands.

Corpse narrows his eyes. "You motherfucker."

He steps forward, the intention clear but Eret is quick to snap in Russian, "grandmother."

Corpse freezes. He turns, grabs Sapnap's gun from his hand and shoots Sapnap in the stomach. Tommy stills as Sapnap collapses to his knees, blood rushing past his fingers. Corpse just blinks.

Sapnap can heal. His healing is only second to Jack's inability to die but Tommy's breath still catches in his throat.

"Let me make myself clear," Eret says, slowly, "you're my spiders, my property. I don't need my abilities or the chair to control you. You've had your fun, but it's time to stop."

“I’ll fucking kill you,” Tommy whispers, vehemently and Eret grins at him.

“I believe you, Theseus,” Eret coos, voice mocking. “Just remember, your little defection, your taste of freedom: it was never meant to be.”

“What’s to stop us leaving now?” Dream asks as Sapnap pulls himself up, bullet in his bloody fingers, skin healing. George is surprisingly silent, something calculating in his eyes.

He is the oldest, the one that’s survived longer than all of them. Tommy’s only slightly fearful of that gaze.

“What’s to stop you leaving?” Eret mocks. They press a button under their desk and the speakers crackle to life.

Tchaikovsky’s *The Sleeping Beauty* plays and all of them shudder, even the mostly lifeless Corpse. Their hands drop the guns to the floor, all of them straightening, chins raising.

“See?” Eret says with a grin. “Now, I’m aware of my other spiders waiting. So let’s just-“

They press another button and words start spilling from the recording. “Longing,” Eret’s voice hits his ears and Tommy shudders, “sixteen, sister, brother, daybreak, homecoming.”

For a second, Tommy doesn’t understand what’s happening. Everything seems to slow, his mind going silent, his mouth turning dry. There’s a tremor running through his body, fingers shaking as ice floods his veins.

Bile climbs up his throat and he blinks at the haze. Is he going to faint? Is he going to pass out?

“Agents.” Eret’s voice cuts through the haze, sharp as a knife, smooth as silk. Tommy instantly slips into first position. Out of the corners of his eyes, he can see the others do the same. “Other than the agents in front of me, the rest of you shall return to your rooms.”

Tommy wants to move, wants to scream but his entire body is frozen. His mind is hazy, fuzzy and he can’t focus on anything apart from Eret.

“Well,” Eret says, calmly, still sipping their tea. “Corpse, you may also return to your room.”

Corpse spins and leaves without a second glance. Eret watches him go with a smile. Then their white eyes fix on them.

“I may have lost my eyes but I’ve not lost my intelligence. You four have defected, willingly, for no apparent reason- actually, that’s not quite true. You three only defected because of your loyalty to Theseus.” White eyes flick to Tommy’s. “You’re the problem here, aren’t you, Theseus?”

God, does Tommy want to answer but he can’t make his vocal chords work. He hasn’t been given permission to speak after all.

“Now, I need to nip that disloyalty in the bud, don’t I?” Eret leans forward. “I could make you prove yourself by killing one of these agents... pick up the gun and point it at Dream.”

Tommy is going to be sick in his throat as he follows the command while screaming at himself not to. His eyes are wide as he looks at Dream and for the first time in a long time, Tommy is consumed by fear.

He’s going to shoot his brother. Eret is going to make him shoot his brother.

Yet Dream’s eyes are calm, accepting as always. Just how Tommy would be in his position.

He doesn’t mind dying by his brother’s hand and yet he’s the one holding the gun, again. Only this isn’t a blank, this won’t not fire. This will kill Dream.

“Put the gun down,” Eret commands and Tommy doesn’t think he’s ever dropped a gun quicker, relief burning through him like a blazing fire. He can see both George and Sapnap relax slightly. “Instead, give me the name of the mark Minx either shot or was going to.”

“Wilbur,” Tommy says, voice working without conscious thought, even as he tries to choke it down. “He’s alive.”

“Wilbur, what?” Eret pushes. “Don’t play, Theseus, not when they’re standing beside you. What do you see them as again?”

“Brothers, sir.” Theseus- Tommy says, slipping further and further down as the haze grows. “His name is Wilbur Soot-Minecraft.”

Eret grins. “There we are, Huntsman. That wasn’t so hard, was it?”

“No, sir,” Tommy breathes.

“Now, to prove your loyalty, we’re going to take a little ride to- where was it? Oh yes, L’Manberg. Once there, you’re going to kill Wilbur.” Eret says, calmly as Tommy’s blood runs cold. “Understood?”

“Yes, sir.” Tommy says, wanting to cry, wanting to throw up. “We will go to L’Manberg and I will kill Wilbur.”

Eret claps. “Perfect. One last thing... what’s your name?”

Tommy wants to say Tommy. It’s his name now, it’s who he is.

But it’s not. Not here, not in the Room.

Here, he is but a number, he is but a Huntsman Spider.

“Theseus, sir.” Tommy- Theseus says. “It’s Theseus.”

Eret’s grin widens. “Good. I’m sure the agents will show you to your room. It’s not the one designed for you but you destroyed that so I hope you don’t mind that it’s smaller.”

They wait. Patiently, silently.

“You’re dismissed.” Eret says and Theseus follows his fellow agents from Eret’s office.

The hallways are silent as they step over bodies. New guards watch them cautiously but they needn’t bother. They’re not people anymore, they’re not human.

They’re spiders, Huntsman Spiders of the Red Room.

They enter a dormitory wing where Sapnap and Dream slip into their own rooms. George nods to the one opposite him, waiting for Theseus to step in before he turns his back, his door closing behind him.

The room has a single bed pushed into the corner, a small window near the ceiling, too small to sneak out of. There’s a sink and a toilet, a few shelves for items of clothing, a clock on the wall and attached to the bed frame, a set of handcuffs.

Theseus sits on his bed and through the haze, mouths the names of the people he remembers.

Niki. Wilbur. Quackity. Tubbo. Ranboo. Phil. Techno. Charlie. Purpled. Punz.

The chair is destroyed but in this state, his mind is a fragile thing and he will not forget them. He refuses to.

Theseus sits there, silently and still, mouthing their names until the door opens to reveal a guard.

“Dinner time.” He says and Theseus rises automatically.

He wonders how long it will take for him to break.

He wonders how long Wilbur has left to live.

There are monsters in the Red Room.

Not the guards and their wandering eyes and hands. Not the teachers with their harsh stares and slaps. Not Eret and not the woman.

These are monsters that are whispered about with a hand held above head, cuffed to the bed frame. These are monsters that children talk about in hushes, fear and excitement mixed in one.

Theseus first hears about Reeth when the snow is particularly heavy and the facility is barely keeping warm with all the fires. The blanket is pulled to his chin as he shivers while boys a few beds down discuss the boy with prehensile ribs.

“He tore through at least twenty,” one boy whispers.

“One of the Spiders said it was thirty-seven guards,” another boy adds.

“It’s why Corpse is so protective of us,” another voice chimes in. “He was in Reeth’s class. It’s why he makes sure the guards leave us alone.”

Reeth isn’t the only monster discussed.

Reeth may be discussed in the boys dorm but Theseus hears from Hannah about a particular Widow in training: Lily.

Soft spoken and quick to lure in people, she was the perfect recruit until she too, decided to turn on the Room.

“Lily could totally kill Reeth,” one of the boys two beds away from Theseus comments. “One of the other Widows, Rae, says she haunts the dorms.”

“Lily can give you a heart attack but Reeth eats you,” a voice mumbles.

Either way, Theseus has heard of the monsters of the Room, of the lurking ghosts.

Children born and dropped off into horror stories do not dream up monsters. They need not when they’re faced with monsters on a daily basis. Instead, children living through hell, dream up saviours in the form of monsters: of boys with sharp teeth and girls with sharp claws, of people using their monstrous abilities to protect them.

Theseus has heard of Corpse lurking outside of dorms, sending guards off to hang themselves in front of classes. He’s heard of Rae following after the Widows led off by the guards and appearing with the girl and blood on her face.

This is the Red Room. There are no saviours. Only monsters.

Chapter End Notes

... I can explain—

They’re back and it’s not going too well :(

My discord: <https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

My Tumblr: @spookyserpent

My Twitter: @spooky_serpent

^ I’ll be posting some preview, no context spoilers for new chapters on my Twitter ;)

I hope you’re all taking care of yourselves!! Thank you all for the support!! <3

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Just some pain :)

TW// child abuse, brainwashing, violence against children, children committing violence against other children, child death mention, triggered mind, blood and injury, dissociation, derealisation, depersonalisation, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Theseus rises at six. He dresses, brushes his teeth and waits for the door to open at half six. Following an orderly line, he enters the canteen, accepts his tray of a slice of toast, some porridge and an apple. He sits with the rest of the graduated agents, eats and then deposits his tray.

He walks to his first exercise of the day. Ballet from half seven to eleven. Then running laps, shooting practice or sparring until one.

He eats in the canteen and then heads to his next exercise of the day. Theseus finds himself in the new recruits' lessons. He has already graduated, he does not need to learn much else.

Sometimes he sits in when they're learning a new language, sometimes he runs the obstacle course with them. He does this until eight. That's how he spends his afternoon.

Once eight rolls around, he eats again in the canteen and then heads off to the shower room before heading back to his room. There, he repeats the names of the ones he's lost over and over until sleep takes him.

He does not use the handcuffs on his bed frame. He has grown out of them.

Rinse and repeat. Day in, day out.

Theseus doesn't try to count the days. He doesn't want to know how many days Wilbur has left.

He lets himself float, doesn't try to fight it. There's no point. This is easier, simpler.

So when he watches the younger recruits fail and get punished, he does not let himself feel their pain. He is an observer, even in his own body. He chooses to simply drift through his experiences without looking too hard.

Being triggered is a strange experience. He's both awake but asleep. He cannot focus on many things but he knows certainties: he cannot kill Eret, he cannot kill the guards, he cannot leave the facility, he cannot use his abilities.

Every time he so much as thinks about it, his body jolts with phantom pains. It reminds him briefly of the chair.

He doesn't like to think about the fact they're trying to replace it. He sometimes makes eye contact with the workers, only for them to quickly look away.

They both know what will happen when it's fixed.

Nor does he like to think about the brief glances Rae gives him, ones that remind him of Budapest where he said he'd try to free them. He's failed terribly.

It's how he finds himself in a ballet studio without even remembering waking up.

It's also how he notices George waiting. He tilts his head and Theseus raises his eyebrows but follows.

"We're teaching them the basics," George says in Russian. "Every language I speak in, use a different one."

Theseus nods. "Sure thing, boss," he replies in Spanish, watching George's lips quirk.

They pass through the corridors and get to a door. "Tommy," George stops him, voice hushed. "Remember what I told you."

"I know," Theseus breathes back. "Survive."

George nods and then his face does a one eighty from the brief softness to cold and calculating.

They enter the room and the boys are standing in rows, straight backs, heads held high. George looks over them all with a disinterested eye. Theseus stands at his shoulder, a little behind him.

"This is how you block a punch," George says in English and without warning, pivots to punch Theseus.

Theseus catches his wrist, tilts his body and flips George onto his back before letting go and stepping away. George flips upright and rolls his eyes.

"Or like this," George says, gestures for Theseus to hit him. Theseus does, snapping a punch out only for George to block using his forearm and snap his own fist out onto Theseus' nose.

His nose doesn't break but he does have to blink the tears from his eyes.

George then turns to the eagle-eyed recruits. "This half," he gestures to the left side of the room, "copy the first move with a partner. The other half copy the second move. Go."

They carry on for a couple of hours, going over basic falls, basic punches, basic kicks before heading off to the canteen to eat. There, Dream and Sapnap approach when he moves to leave.

“We’re picking up the recruits from Siberia,” Sapnap says in Russian. “Then you’ll join Dream with the obstacle course.”

Theseus looks at them, tilts his head to look over at George and knows exactly what this is. This, like many other exercises in the Room, is a test. A test of loyalty, of trust.

Will Theseus try and run? Or will he accept the reward of being with his brothers and give in?

“Let’s go,” Theseus says and follows Sapnap wordlessly to the military helicopter.

Sitting down and strapping in, he places the headset over his head. The blades start to turn and the helicopter rises into the sky. Sapnap is silent, just watching Theseus as he sits there.

The air is sharp and cold and Theseus is only in a small jacket, matching the rest of the agents’ uniform. He does not shiver, does not twitch.

He has yet to be given proper Huntsman gear, the body armour and jacket that’s lined with a Kevlar-like material to block bullets and blades. He’s not been given any weapons: not even throwing stars or the discs of electricity. He’s not even allowed near the armoury.

“Theseus, huh?” Sapnap asks through the headset and Theseus rolls his eyes, blinking back to reality.

“That’s my name.”

“Is it?” Sapnap asks, voice oddly soft and Theseus exhales sharply.

“It is now.”

Sapnap studies him for a long second and then nods, turning his face away. Theseus looks at him, memorising the outline of his face and wondering if he also repeats the names of the ones he’s lost in the dark of his room.

Before Theseus can ask, the helicopter is dropping and he’s looking out at endless plains of snow.

Sapnap jumps out, heat melting at the snow beneath his feet, and sets off a flare. It bursts bright orange in the sky and then he leans back and stares at his watch. Two hours, that’s all they have.

Theseus jumps out of the helicopter to stand beside Sapnap, trying to gain some of his body heat.

“We can’t escape, we can’t run and if I see Wilbur again, I will kill him,” Theseus murmurs lowly in Arabic. “I have no out and I can’t save you, any of you.”

“So you’re just rolling over?” Sappnap replies and Theseus shrugs.

“I made a deal with myself that day I killed someone for the first time. I would live. I would live through the training and I would survive the Room.” Theseus briefly meets his gaze. “This isn’t giving up, it’s surviving.”

“And when they fix the chair and break you?”

Theseus rolls his eyes, looks out into the snow at the first sign of movement. “Then it’s not like I’ll remember ever wanting to escape anyway.”

Sappnap’s gaze is dark as he looks back just as a recruit stumbles closer. Blood coats his face and he’s shaking with adrenaline but he’s alive.

Theseus points to the helicopter and the boy climbs up, tucking his limbs close.

Two hours later, Theseus sits beside Sappnap as he radios in, “eighteen left.”

Once back at the facility, Theseus leaves Sappnap to head around to the obstacle course. He passes through the cold concrete and guards with harsh stares.

Theseus doesn’t know how Eret is able to employ so many guards. Who decides to partake in guarding a facility which leaves children dead in the dozens?

He walks through hallways filled with the sounds of teaching, gives the medical wing a wide berth and heads out the doors. Snow falls heavily and Theseus breathes in the chill, letting his mind quieten as he approaches where Dream stands, arms crossed over his chest, blond hair speckled with snowflakes.

Over by the finish rope, Brooke stands with Tina. These courses, recitals and missions are the only time Widows and Spiders really meet and mix.

“How are they?” He asks and Dream shrugs.

“They’re not used to the cold.”

Theseus watches as the boys and girls shiver and shake, lips and fingertips turning blue. They will learn to push through, to ignore the way their body reacts or they’ll die.

Theseus still remembers the way they held their head under water, the way they held their hands over flames, the days shivering and burning. He learnt and he lived.

Twenty-eight to one.

“They’ll learn to live through it,” Theseus comments. “We did.”

Dream hums. “You’ve accepted your role rather quickly.”

Theseus sighs. “What else am I suppose to do? Fight back and blow it up again? I can’t. None of us can.”

“So you’re giving up?”

Theseus snaps his head around, the haze fully leaving his mind the first time in days. “Fuck you.”

“There he is.”

“No, shut up,” Theseus hisses. “Wilbur is going to die. I can’t stop it, you can’t, Sap and George can’t. The only one who can is Eret and right now, the longer I’m quiet and good, they have no reason to send me after him. I’m trying to save his fucking life, trying to save me own-“

“Eret would never-“

“You don’t know that!” Theseus snaps, fists clenching, teeth gritted. “Felix and Reeth and Lily and all of the others we can’t remember, they were powerful, too. They were still shot. They still died.”

Theseus turns back to the recruits trying to fight below the rope. The boy is struggling but Theseus can see the determination in the girl’s eyes. She will ultimately survive.

Just like Theseus will.

He lets the haze fill over his mind again. His fists unclench along with his jaw. He relaxes his stance, breathes in the chill of the air.

“I’m surviving,” he says, quietly as Dream remains silent beside him. “Whatever the cost. Whatever it takes. I will survive.”

Dream cocks his head, green eyes burning. “One day, you will be free again, I promise.”

Theseus scoffs. “Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

The hours tick by in silence apart from when Dream calls out names. The chill burns but Theseus welcomes it.

He doesn’t like to think about it but being this, being this solder, this spy, this spider, is something easy, something simple. He doesn’t need to think about what to eat or whether he should be picking up a new language.

Everything here is monitored, maintained. He rises and he works and he sleeps. Day in, day out.

He doesn’t have to worry about people liking him or fitting in. He doesn’t have to concern himself with watching TV or trying new ice cream flavours.

Theseus isn’t a person, here. He isn’t human.

Theseus is a Huntsman Spider. One of twenty-eight. The sole survivor.

It's simple.

Only when it's dark and the guards approach do they go in. Theseus eats in the canteen beside Corpse and then heads to the showers.

Half an hour later, he's lying on his bed in the dark, repeating their names, over and over and over again.

Niki. Wilbur. Quackity. Tubbo. Ranboo. Phil. Techno. Charlie. Purpled. Punz.

He falls into a quick slumber, missing the familiar pressure of Henry in his arms, missing the familiar music of his record player.

In the mountains, the wind howls as loud as the wolves at her heels. She waits, not even noticing the freezing temperatures as her sister approaches like a beacon, crows cawing at her shoulders.

Across from each other, they could almost be described as twins. Even if she has eyes like glittering stars and her sister has eyes as dark as night. One sister, giving up death to live. One sister, giving up life to die. Both in sacrifice to one another.

She nearly scoffs at the thought. That was long ago when they stuck to the rules they wrote into existence. Before husbands and children.

They study one another before her sister asks, "why can I feel so many immortals slip through the veil, Clara?"

She laughs at her sister. "You should've asked me that decades ago, Kristin."

She opens her mouth, ready to goad, when she feels it. Her spider, crossing the threshold, back into the silk of her web, back into the safety of her woven cocoon.

She grins victoriously and hisses, "he finally came in from the cold."

Without another word, she spins on her heel, making the trek back to her web, back to her spiders.

"What are you up to?" Her sister breathes, the sound carrying to her ears but she does not stop and answer.

Her silence has always spoken louder than her words.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy is not having a good time but mumza!

My discord: <https://discord.gg/qWXdWgd2Gm>

My Tumblr: @spookyserpent

My Twitter: @spooky_serpent

^ I'll be posting some preview, no context spoilers for new chapters on my Twitter ;)

Thank you all for your comments, kudos and interactions! I hope you're all taking care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

We've got some different views today lads ;)

TW// alcoholism, past injury mention, mention of shooting a child, violence, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You can’t go to the Russian government,” Niki breathes, face scrunched up. Phil just smiles in response.

Ranboo and Tubbo look between each other. “If it’s any consolation-“ Tubbo starts.

“-we would love to go to Russia,” Ranboo finishes. Both share a soft, almost innocent smile that Phil doesn’t trust at all.

Jack, eating more noodles from a takeout box, says around a mouthful, “not a good idea.”

“I’m the Angel of Death.” Phil says the words with the power they hold. None of them so much as blink.

“And the Russians will still chew you up and spit you out,” Niki stresses. “You’ve had no luck trying to find documents relating to Ranboo; how do you think you’re going to convince them to tell you all of their secrets?”

“We could stab them,” Techno suggests and Wilbur grins at him, his black eye healed.

“Or if the stabbing doesn’t work, I could compel them!”

Niki proceeds to mutter some harsh words in Russian that leave Wilbur frowning and Jack snorting into his noodles. She looks up, eyes dangerous.

“They will kill you.”

“I can’t die,” Phil reminds her. Tubbo laughs, Ranboo giggles into his hand.

“Why aren’t you more concerned?” Wilbur speaks before she can. “It’s been two weeks.”

She raises her eyebrows, expression suddenly thunderous. “You think I’m not concerned?”

It’s clearly a trap but Wilbur steps into it with a disarming smile. “You seem pretty calm for a concerned person.”

Her eyes narrow. “After four days of silence, I knew he was gone. He’s back there and I don’t know where it is. We have no means to track them and I’d rather not be chased down by my fellow agents again.”

“So we go to Russian,” Phil says, hands out to hopefully stop Niki from strangling Wilbur considering her murderous gaze.

“This is going to end terribly.” Jack breathes and Techno snorts.

“How’s the chest?” Puffy asks as she steps into the white room, Schlatt grinning from his chair, drinking out of his half-empty cup.

Puffy has tried to stop her brother drinking. It’s a lost cause.

“Good. Still good from the last four fucking times you asked. They discharged me a week ago, Puff-Puff.”

Puffy frowns at him. “Don’t call me that, Johnny.” He frowns back and she rolls her eyes. “Before you inevitably ask, no. Still no news on Tommy. The Syndicate have been rebuilding.”

“It’s been two weeks,” he says with a groan. “Something has to be happening.”

“Not that any of us can find.”

Schlatt runs his hand over his hair, itching at the base of his horns. “Fuck.”

Puffy sits on his desk, raises her eyebrows at him. “Why don’t you get that hacker of yours to find more information?”

That’s the bit that’s been bothering her. Tubbo is by far the best hacker Puffy has ever encountered and she’s never met anyone within Schlatt’s inner circle who can hack.

And yet Tubbo was only able to find documents completely blacked out. It was good information, enough for them to work out Theseus was working for a Russian organisation but that was all.

Schlatt though, he was able to find documents filled with information, not blacked out.

It’s more than a little suspicious.

And that’s coming from a woman who’s just found out she’s dating an ex-assassin.

“There’s nothing else to find,” he says, eyes dark. “You had him right there and then you let him go.”

“You shot a child,” she hisses back and he rolls his eyes.

“He’s killed more people than Technoblade and Wilbur combined. Are you really going to be moral about this?”

Puffy’s eyes narrow. “He’s a child.”

“He’s a killer,” Schlatt snaps and swallows the rest of his drink without a wince.

Puffy reels back, shocked and stunned.

She can understand being cautious, being wary. Finding out Niki is an ex-Black Widow left Puffy feeling exposed. This is the woman she’s told her secrets too, told her deepest thoughts. Niki could easily exploit that.

God, Niki had been in her home, had met her children. They could be at risk.

But Puffy didn’t doubt her honest words and apologises. Niki didn’t want to hurt her children or her.

Niki’s past was her own and Puffy wasn’t going to judge her for surviving. She’s alive and she got out.

Puffy trusts Niki and she sure as hell isn’t going to turn a child away when he’s clearly scared and running.

“What happened to you?” Puffy asks, voice quiet and something like pain, like regret flashes in his eyes.

He changed, all those years ago when Alyssa left and they found that blond man watching them. The man had left, too, after a couple of weeks and Schlatt had taken a vacation for a few months.

He never did mention where he went, who he spoke to, why he left.

When he returned, his ambition had grown ten-fold and his alcoholism only got worse.

“One day,” Schlatt says, voice just as quiet, “you’ll realise that I’m trying to save your life.”

Puffy watches as he stands from his desk and walks away, leaving her alone in his office, his empty glass staring at her.

Quackity never believed in fate. From a poor child fighting for his education, to relying on criminals to pay his way, he’s only ever had belief in himself. Belief that he could rise above those who looked down at him.

After Phil helped with his bills, Quackity thrived in law school, rising to the top of his class in a couple of weeks. He got his degree and he worked for Phil while always watching the way he worked.

Phil sat at the top, Wilbur as his advisor, Techno as his muscle. Together, they led the Syndicate, gaining a formidable name. Every criminal in the city of L'Manberg knew who they were and they made sure to be in everyone's business.

Working from their base under their warehouse, they have hands in the pockets of government officials, the local police and even have befriended the Heroes. They deal in weapons and drugs and make sure they're always expanding.

They're dangerous and Quackity may have worked for them during that time but he was also learning. He made his own contacts, branched out until he sat at the top of his own empire.

Las Nevadas.

And then he had met Karl and suddenly Quackity was believing in more than himself.

Karl is sunshine and brightness, giggles and Monster cans and Quackity can't be sad or stressed around him. Karl makes Quackity happy, makes him laugh and grin and it feels so natural.

It feels good.

And then they met Nick.

He had stumbled into Las Nevadas, dark hair and burning eyes, warm in both smile and touch. He made Quackity roll his eyes with a fond smile and Karl blush the brightest red Quackity had ever seen.

Quackity isn't ashamed to admit that it took a short while for their pair to become a trio.

He was willing to marry them both.

Now those memories are tainted. Burnt at the edges. Sour to the taste.

Nick isn't Nick. He's Sapnap, a Russian assassin, someone Quackity not only let into his home but into his heart.

And he's supposed to be the smart one.

"You're thinking too loudly," Karl breathes from where he's laying across the white couch, Monster sitting in his hand.

"What do we do if he comes back?" Quackity asks, tiredly.

"Tell him I'm not a Hero anymore and that you're already part of the dark side--"

Quackity snorts in spite of himself and Karl giggles at the sound. "C'mon," Quackity breathes, spinning in his chair to face him. He's met with a fond look and that floppy mop of hair. "He's dangerous."

Karl rolls his eyes. "I can rewind and speed up time. You're literally known throughout the world for being a scary dude and part of the Syndicate. He's not the only scary one."

"He came to spy on us," Quackity stresses and Karl sighs, sips his drink.

"I'm not supposed to tell you," Karl starts and Quackity's instantly leaning forward, intrigued, "but Tommy is now known as Theseus, so--"

"Did he hurt--" Quackity rushes out, panic curling in his stomach but Karl waves him off.

"Nah. He actually said - which with hindsight is very telling - that Nick- Sapnap can fake a lot of things but not love. That he did care about us and that he probably won't be able to apologise enough." Karl fits him with an oddly serious stare. "He said we shouldn't abandon him."

Quackity blinks at that. Finding out Tommy was apart of the same organisation as Sapnap - both assassins - definitely made him reconsider his stance on letting random people join his business.

He didn't see the signs, or maybe he did. Maybe Quackity chose to ignore them because to him, Tommy was always more important than his past. Tommy, the boy that was the best pickpocket he ever had, the boy full of jokes and laughs and insults.

Another person he cared for that turned out to be lying.

And yet Quackity doesn't feel any rage or hate towards the boy. He just wants him safe. He wants him back in Las Nevadas. He wants to hear his laugh again.

He swallows. "Still an assassin."

"And Punz is your merc," Karl reminds him with another pointed sip of his drink. "You're many things, Q, but you're not a hypocrite and you're not stupid."

He sighs, running a hand through his hair, beanie lying on the desk before him. "What do you suggest, then?"

"We hear him out," Karl says with a shrug. "Both of them. Like in a court--" Quackity snorts and Karl grins, "- you hear both arguments before the jury comes to an agreement. We can't judge them without listening to all the facts."

Quackity takes a deep breath and exhales. He can see the logic in Karl's argument but also the heartfelt need to know if Sapnap truly cared about them.

Not only that, Quackity always was more than willing to give Tommy a home.

"Okay," he says and Karl fist bumps the air. "We'll hear him out. Both of them."

The British Embassy in Russia don't appear to like that Phil is there. He will admit, he finds it a little funny.

Wilbur's leaning against the counter, trying to sweet-talk one of the receptionists. Jack's standing beside him, translating in an almost tired fashion while Phil stands behind them, wings out. Techno is watching Tubbo and Ranboo, pink hair tied back, sword by his side.

Phil is wearing his plague mask, Wilbur's wearing his jester mask and Techno is in his boar skull mask. The three leaders of the Syndicate.

Ranboo has his sunglasses on with his black and white mask. Tubbo is beside him, mask covering his eyes and nose in a yellow and black design.

Then there's Niki, who the minute they entered the embassy, disappeared from sight. Not that Jack seemed too concerned.

"She's literally trained in espionage and could kill you with her pinky toe; I'm sure she's fine."

Phil watches as the man behind the desk tilts his head as another man enters, approaches the desk. Ranboo looks up as Tubbo says, "I know you!"

The man blinks at Tubbo. With shoulder-length brown hair and dark eyes, scruff on his cheeks and glasses, Phil vaguely remembers his face.

Funnily enough, he doesn't seem all that bothered by their masks or Phil's wings. There's a calm expression on his face as he looks them over, no fear or apprehension. It's more intrigued, more excited.

"You do?" He asks, American accent coating his words and Tubbo nods.

"You and your friend wore white and black suits," Tubbo says and the man smiles at him.

"Oh! You were at the American embassy," the man says, then looks up to Phil. "Hi. I'm Mark."

"Hi," he replies, not giving his name. "If you were in the American embassy, why are you here?"

The man rolls his eyes. "I've tried there, no luck. Thought the British one might help."

"What are you here for?" Tubbo asks with a grin.

"Someone to get me a meeting with someone higher up," Mark says. "My friend has some unfinished business."

A member of staff sticks their head around the door. "Mark Fischbach?"

Mark grins and Phil sees the darkness there. "That's me. Bye!"

Another man exits and taps the receptionist on the shoulder. “Angel of Death?” He asks in English and Phil turns his head.

The man is dressed in an expensive suit and has a warm smile on his face. Phil knows he’s about to be lied to, he can feel it in the way Wilbur’s eyes narrow behind his jester’s mask.

“We have no documentation of these files-“

Tubbo frowns at him. “Then how come I was able to find them in the government’s database. The Russian government to be precise.”

The man keeps the smile on his face; looking to the counter where the files sit. “I don’t know where you have got these but the Russian government has no idea what the Red Room is.”

“Then I’m sure I could talk to someone actually in the government about it,” Phil says, tilting his head, flexing his wings out.

Wilbur grins. “Come on,” he says, voice honeyed, “let us talk to your boss.”

The man blinks, turns but is stopped by the doors swinging open. Niki strides out with a smirk, that dangerous look in her eyes. She’s not hiding her identity like they are.

Even though she may be in combat gear - it reminds Phil strongly of Theseus’ getup - her hood is down and pink hair made visible. She doesn’t wear any mask on her face.

“I can take you to the old facility,” she says, nonchalantly.

“How?” Techno breathes and Niki shrugs.

“For legal reasons, let’s just say, the bones in the hands and fingers are easily breakable.”

Wilbur snorts as Tubbo grins up at her. “You’re so cool.”

“Thank you,” she replies and then looks at the man. She says something harsh in Russian that has his face blanching and Jack snorting. With that, she turns back to Phil. “Let’s go.”

“This is old base though?” Wilbur asks and she nods.

“They don’t have anything else on paper but I’m hoping if we get there, we’re at least signalling to them that we know.” She pauses to look at Phil, eyes wide, pink fringe falling across her face. “They will come and they will try and kill us all.”

“Let them try,” Phil says with confidence, even as his stomach flips with worry.

Chapter End Notes

Phil wanting to fight the Russian government? More likely than you’d think ;)

Thank you all for your comments, kudos and interactions! I hope you're all taking care of yourselves!! <3

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry in advance...

TW// major character death, mention of child death, violence, gore, blood, injury, brainwashing, triggered mind, dissociation, derealisation, depersonalisation, abuse/child abuse, panic attacks, mental breakdown, alcoholism, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Snow crunches under his boots as he looks around, breathing in the crisp chill of the air. Wilbur and Tubbo talk quietly about something to do with the climate but Phil is only focused on Niki.

A now silent Niki, who walks like she's being compelled forward towards the half-destroyed building.

Brick and marble pillars lay undisturbed. Wooden floorboards are scattered around and Phil can just about imagine the magnitude of the building before him based on the remaining buildings, rising high into the sky. Some even have turrets remaining, but the untouched building has a sloped roof and small windows.

"The dormitories," Niki murmurs, accent switching to Russian unconsciously. "He made sure to not touch the dorms."

She steps over the brick and stone, walking with a single mindedness that Phil can't help but follow. Across debris and rubble all hidden by a thick layer of snow, she pauses atop a hill of concrete and Phil follows her gaze to the lines of graves.

"These are unmarked," Techno comments, walking closer and Niki laughs, a hollow sound.

"They all will be." She says, quietly. "Names only mattered when we graduated. If you died in the program, you were a failure. Failures don't get to have names on graves. Failures aren't mourned."

"That's horrifying," Wilbur mutters and Phil can feel his wings puff up in agreement.

"The berry bush," she whispers, almost longingly and hisses what sounds like a prayer in Russian, hands reaching out but not touching. "To the best Odette I've ever seen," she murmurs in English.

Then, without another glance, she walks from the graves into the building, pushing a large wooden door open, left ajar with snow building in the gap.

Phil can see Techno trying to count the number of graves from the corner of his eye. After a while, he stops, face a mix of rage and sorrow. There are simply too many.

Inside, the building is oddly beautiful. High ceilings and wooden flooring and deep reds and golds. Phil would be blown away but the hair is rising at the back of his neck and his wings are twitching.

He takes another look around, realises why.

The rooms are filled with chairs in oddly straight lines with a single projector or blackboard. Along the hall, rooms sit with beds in the same orderly lines, handcuffs on the bedframes and blankets too thin to block the cold.

“I would take you underground,” Niki says, sticking close to Jack, who’s shockingly quiet as he looks around. “But the structure is too fragile. I don’t want it to fall on us.”

“What’s underground?” Tubbo asks, wings fluttering and Niki’s eyes are dead as she pauses in place.

“The real Room,” she replies, monotonously. “This... this is for show. Underground there’s training rooms and shooting ranges and-“

She chokes up and Jack gently holds out a hand. She grips it, shakes herself. Clearing her throat, she looks up and her face has changed from dead to reserved.

“Let’s go outside,” she says and walks out, not waiting for them to follow.

Phil shares a look with Wilbur and Techno. It seems he may have misjudged just how horrid this place is.

The air is chilled this morning but there isn’t any snow. He misses watching the fall of it. He has a sudden memory of walking to Las Nevadas, snow falling and he freezes.

He is not Tommy here.

He is simply Theseus.

A punch aimed for his face pulls him back under the safety of the triggered haze.

He spars with Dream, curling under his arm and flipping him. There’s a hand on his ankle though, pulling him down before he can blink. Yet both of them dart up in quick succession, circling one another like lions waiting for the first sign of blood, the first sign of weakness.

There’s no one watching. There rarely is.

It's not like Theseus can leave. The guards don't need to be overly cautious.

Dream has him in a headlock. Theseus uses his spider training to lift up and drop down, throwing Dream from his shoulder. It's a roundhouse kick and a punch. A duck and jab.

He charges forward, curling an arm around Dream's neck and sliding his leg across the back of Dream's knocking him to the ground. Dream flips up, all skill and fluidity Theseus has yet to fall into.

He can hold his own but it rarely looks effortless. His fighting style is more Sappnap's: aggressive and quick. Dream takes after George, almost like a Widow's style: sleek and smooth.

Dream blocks a punch, snapping one out onto Theseus' nose. His head snaps back and Dream spins, kicking him in the stomach. It throws him back and Dream kicks at his knee, wrapping an arm around his throat and tightening.

Theseus reaches a hand for Dream's face as he slams an elbow back into his ribs and goes for Dream's eyes.

They're interrupted by the sound of footsteps.

They break apart and look up, both barely panting. A guard tilts his head and Dream and Theseus follow after him, silent footfalls following the loud stomping of boots.

They pass the halls and floors of concrete until they're at Eret's door. The guard presses in the number and the door groans open, Eret waiting behind their desk, Sappnap and George standing in first position behind them.

"Agents," Eret greets and then immediately slips into business mode, hands clasping on the desk before them. "Theseus," they say with big, white eyes, "I would like to have it known that you've been so good in accepting your role back in the Room."

"Thank you, sir," Theseus says, monotone, blank.

"And as a reward, I was going to let your friend live," Eret says, voice dripping honey and Theseus knows what's coming before it hits, mentally prepares to not drop his blank expression. "But your friend seems to not be able to leave you alone."

Eret pulls out a tablet from their drawer, titling the screen to Theseus and Dream before pressing play. That's how Theseus sees Phil with his wings out in what looks to be an embassy of some kind.

Wilbur and Techno and Tubbo and Ranboo. Theseus doesn't know the other man with them - buzzed hair and bicolour glasses but he knows them.

He watches as Niki appears - Niki, his mind hisses, Niki the Black Widow that should know better than being in her home country with her face out in the open - and watches as they all follow her out.

Eret flicks the screen across to another video, more CCTV, which show two cars pulling up in the snow. For a long moment, Theseus studies the snow with confused eyes before it clicks.

They're at the old Room's facility.

"This is a declaration of war," Eret continues, turning the tablet off and placing it on the desk before them. "But it is also some rather stupid bugs flying into the web of a spider."

Theseus knows what's coming even as he asks, "what do you suggest we do, sir?"

Two hours later, they're pulling up a mile away from the old facility and Theseus' breath is catching. The brick is crumbling, all of the main buildings destroyed bar the dormitory wing.

Theseus couldn't handle it if he hurt the children.

But here and now, it looks nothing like the building he remembers. The marble pillars and wooden floors, the red and gold design of Soviet Supremacy.

If Theseus turns his head around the crumbling brick, he can see the remains of unmarked graves, a blackberry bush growing atop them. At least the bush survived. Hannah's legacy.

The graves keep going back in the snow and Theseus tried to count them once, when he was close to graduating. There were simply too many.

This is just the ruins of something great. Snow has covered most of the bottom layer and it's oddly beautiful. Destruction but immortalised.

"Taking in your handy work?" Eret asks, amusement in their tone and Theseus just blinks.

"I didn't stay long enough to see the damage done," he replies, catches himself. "Sir."

"Theseus," Eret drawls and Theseus stops, looks at them. "This Wilbur may be the son of the Angel of Death, but he can still die. Especially if Death is distracted and Clara is right about you."

Theseus doesn't quite understand but he nods all the same. Eret then gestures him forward and Theseus starts to walk through the snow, towards the front of the facility.

Eret follows behind, Dream and Sapnap flanking them, as George brings up the rear. There are guards stationed by the car and Theseus knows if Eret pushes their panic button, more will flood closer.

The snow is deep and thick and Theseus longs for more of it, so that it takes more time before they reach Wilbur. But at this point, his death is inevitable. Theseus cannot fight the triggered haze of his mind.

He can hear the clock ticking down. Deafening in his skull, like his own heartbeat stuttering in his chest when he took a bullet for Wilbur.

He supposes there is something poetic about that, something just.

Only Theseus lived. He hopes Phil will be able to bring Wilbur back, considering he supposedly has death abilities. Surely he can.

Wilbur won't actually die.

He will die but he will come back. He will live. His heart will continue to beat.

Rounding the building, Theseus spots Niki first. She's standing atop a pile of debris, looking out and she freezes at the sight of them, eyes flicking over their faces before landing on Eret's.

Her eyes widen in panic and before she can blink, Eret is nodding and Dream clenches his fist. The frozen ground rises up to curl around her legs, locking her in place.

"Widow," Eret greets, starts to speak in Russian, "longing, sixteen, sister, brother, daybreak, homecoming."

They all shudder and Theseus watches as Niki freezes in place, face falling carefully blank. Her position straightens, her eyes shutter and her chin tips up.

"Niki?" The man with the buzzed hair calls but Niki doesn't even twitch. Her attention is firmly on Eret.

Behind her, Phil is standing in his mask, flanked by his sons, Tubbo and Ranboo with the man Theseus doesn't know just a little behind them. The man has to be held back by Techno as he tries to reach for Niki.

What's strange, though, is that as Niki becomes the Black Widow, something happens to Ranboo.

Ranboo does a full-body shudder, eyes widening as he seems to still. Eret notices, of course they do, but they focus on Niki, even as Theseus looks at Ranboo with a new eye.

"Agent?" Eret asks and Niki snaps into first position.

"Yes, sir?" She replies in Russian and Eret smiles.

"You're the Black Widow that torched half the Room, aren't you?"

No twitch, no blink. Just blankness. "Yes, sir."

Eret hums and then turns to where Tubbo is shaking Ranboo, who's not making any movement. "I do not recognise you," Eret says and Ranboo twitches but doesn't reply. "Are you from the Red Room?"

"Yes," Ranboo replies in Russian and Theseus can feel bile climb up his throat but then Ranboo shakes his head and says in English, "what- what's happening?"

"What the fuck did you do?" Wilbur spits, voice honeyed and Eret grins.

“Triggered my agents,” they say. “They’re easier to control when they’re simply spiders.”

“What the-“

“Hush.” Eret say in English, waving their hand and Dream clenches his hand. The Earth dips, dragging them all under as Eret turns to Ranboo. “I don’t remember you so why are you like this?”

“I found him in Moscow,” Phil speaks for Ranboo, wing flexing to block the boy from sight. “He had blood on his face and only spoke with an English accent. It seems he was running from you. That’s why we can’t find any paperwork for him.”

That’s when Theseus realises what’s happening. The boy in his class, the one that never came to the helicopter at the end of the Siberia trip. The boy with the bicolour eyes.

“The Siberia exercise, sir,” Theseus says in English, monotonously. “I remember a boy with eyes like his not returning, presumed dead.”

Dream twitches, eyes wide as he looks at Ranboo. Both George and Sapnap also turn to the boy.

All five of the family snap their heads to him at his voice, even the man turns to him. Theseus looks over Phil’s shoulder, not making eye contact. He doesn’t want to be here, doesn’t want to do this.

But he will, when given the instruction.

Eret hums, tilting their head. “Siberia to Moscow, that’s a journey. What powers do you have?”

“He doesn’t have to tell you!” Tubbo snaps, wings flapping angrily. “Let Tommy go, you fucking asshole!”

Theseus swallows, doesn’t try to correct him. Eret simply laughs, lips pulled into a shark’s grin, teeth almost as white as their eyes.

Even with Phil’s impressive wings out and Techno’s pink hair and boars mask, something about Eret standing without armour, just in their long regal outfit - red and gold - is more intimidating. They look unfazed, almost amused by the turn of events.

Especially when backed with four Huntsman Spider agents of the Red Room. They’re all in their combat gear, the hood not covering their heads, mask secured to the bottom of their faces. Their bodies are littered with pockets and holsters filled with weapons and they all know why.

This is a performance as much as it is an assassination. Like the sleek black cars they use when transporting assets, like the regal gear Eret wears. This is Eret’s way of putting a gold collar on a dog.

See the Huntsman Spider agents in all their terrifying glory.

With their faces shown with the masks of obedience, the picture painted is clear: the family opposite them aren't leaving alive.

"Theseus," Eret says, calmly and all three of the agents at Eret's shoulders tense. "Tell your friends how you feel."

"Nothing, sir," he replies, monotonous. "Huntsman Spiders do not feel."

Eret grins. Theseus' fingers twitch.

"Don't!" Phil snaps suddenly, panic lining his voice but Theseus doesn't look away from Eret.

"There's blood in your web, Theseus," Eret breathes and Theseus' entire body locks as his mind falls silent. "Wipe it out."

Theseus doesn't blink, he barely breathes as he takes a gun from his shoulder holster, lifts it up and aims it at Wilbur.

He wants to aim for the chest, give him a fighting chance but the trigger phrase isn't allowing anything less than perfection. The way George taught him when he was a recruit. The way he killed on his missions.

The safety is off and the gun is cocked and Theseus pulls the trigger.

At first, nothing seems to happen. The world seems to fall quiet, time slows.

Then Theseus feels the kickback as Wilbur jerks, hole tearing through his jester's mask to his skull. He stumbles and then collapses, eyes wide in fear and confusion. He falls and does not rise again, chest still.

Theseus watches, detached and then his entire body starts to shake. Adrenaline ripples through him, a metallic taste filling his mouth.

He's proven his loyalty so why does it taste so much like betrayal?

Then it hits him. The gravity of what he's just done, the weight of the world dropping onto his shoulders.

Tubbo and Ranboo start to yell. The man Theseus doesn't recognise struggles against Dream's hold to reach him. Techno's entire body shudders as Phil snaps his head around, feathers puffing up in distress.

Theseus waits for Wilbur to rise, waits for Phil's death power to kick in. He waits for Wilbur to shake it off, to laugh about it.

Wilbur does not rise.

He lays cradled in the snow, motionless, chest still.

“Seems Death is a little preoccupied,” Eret breathes, victoriously and Theseus can’t stop shaking. Eret reaches a hand out and pats Theseus’ shoulder. “Clara was right about you, Theseus. I’m glad. You’re going to be a very useful asset.”

The three at Eret’s shoulders jerk back slightly. Phil stares and then his shoulders hunch. “Wil?” He whispers, voice strained. “Wil, mate, get up.”

Wilbur does not get up.

“Wilbur, this isn’t funny,” Techno draws, panic in that deep voice as he starts to struggle against Dream’s hold on his legs. “Stop pretending to be Ghostbur. It wasn’t funny the first time, it’s not funny now.”

“Wilbur?” Tubbo whispers, tears flooding from his eyes. “Wil- why isn’t he- shouldn’t he be-?”

Eret waves his hand and the ground shifts as Dream unclenches his fist. Phil immediately drops to Wilbur’s side, pulling his head into his lap. He removes the jester’s mask from his face and Theseus-

Theseus-

Tommy can’t breathe because he is Tommy.

He is Tommy when he shoots Wilbur.

He is Tommy when he betrays his family.

He is Tommy when his entire world crumbles at his feet.

The forest of calm in his mind cannot save him, cannot distract him from this. It burns to dust, leaving him heaving, chest rapidly rising and falling as he tries desperately to hide.

He can’t.

Dream and Sapnap are staring carefully at Eret while George stares Tommy down. His face must be doing something, not being able to school his expression of pure terror. He is not being emotionless, he is being weak.

Pain is relative compared to this.

It feels like his chest is exploding. There’s a pressure on his rib cage, pushing against his heart.

He has been burnt and bruised and bloody. He has been tortured more than he has fingers on his hands. He has experienced pain before, has died before - the white tuft of hair shows that much - and yet this is somehow so much worse.

He has been ripped apart and put back together again for his graduation.

He pleaded for death then.

Now he pleads for life.

Can they swap? Can he take Wilbur's place?

"Wilbur, son, please," Phil whispers and Tommy can't breathe.

"Phil?" Techno mumbles and Tommy can see even Niki twitch, eyes flooding with something even as she remains rooted. Much like how Ranboo shakes even as his legs remain locked.

"I can't- can't feel him," Phil says and it knocks the air from Tommy's lungs. He swallows blood as Phil presses on Wilbur's chest, grips the side of neck.

Wilbur does not wake. He does not rise. He does not breathe.

"But-" Tubbo whimpers and Tommy can feel tears build in his eyes.

Wilbur is dead.

Wilbur is dead because of him.

George's face is focused on Tommy as his body shakes with conflicting emotions. His mind is burning, screaming for him to do something, to give in to Eret, to curl up by Wilbur.

Every nerve snaps and splinters. He feels like he's on fire, like he's burning up inside, like his very soul is being cut up.

He is a spider on a web, dangling by Eret's silk, eight eyes watching as he debates the age old question.

Is he a spider or is he a fly?

In this silk, he is suffocating, he is wrapped too tightly to breathe. This cocoon is no longer his home; it's his cage.

But how can a spider ever know freedom when all it's known is the cage of the silk wrapped around it?

"C'mon, Wil, please just open your eyes," Phil pleads and Tommy is choking on his saliva, his throat closing up. The shaking is getting progressively worse.

"Theseus-" Eret begins but Tommy is fraying at the edges, blood ringing in his ears, eyes blurring.

He decides then if this is what it takes to be a spider, if this is what being wrapped in that suffocating silk like a fly would be, he doesn't want to be either.

He wants to be human.

“Shut up,” he hisses and his voice has dipped into something honeyed, something sickly sweet and Eret is freezing with their mouth open, no sound coming out.

Tommy pauses before realising why.

Tommy has Wilbur’s power now.

Which means Wilbur is-

Tommy only steals the powers of the people he kills.

Wilbur will always be with him, like the many others that inhibit Tommy’s very spirit. He will join the hallucinations and the wings and the senses. He will join the powers he lost through time or memory lost. He will join the names of the dead, all listed on Tommy’s very soul.

More red in his ledger.

This time, it’s the blood of someone he considered a brother. Wilbur Soot-Minecraft.

That’s the final straw.

The burning in his mind fizzles out and he takes a shaky step forward as he feels Eret’s control dissipate. Tommy’s paying attention now and Corpse isn’t here to control him and Tommy has lost everything.

Tommy will not let himself be led by Eret any longer. Not when his brother is dead, blood staining the snow of Tommy’s home country.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, swallows as the sound comes out croaked. George’s eyes are widening as Eret’s lips twist. “I’m so fucking sorry. I don’t- I’m sorry-“

“Theseus-“ Eret tries again but Tommy spins around.

“Shut the fuck up,” he snarls, voice honeyed. “I’m not Theseus. I’m not- I’m Tommy. My name is Tommy.”

The family opposite him have barely noticed, too busy staring at Wilbur’s open eyes, head lying in Phil’s lap.

He looks to Dream, to Sapnap, to George, to Niki, even Ranboo. “I don’t know if this will work but wake up, the trigger no longer works,” he says, voice honeyed and then pistol whips Eret, smashing the gun into their temple before he can think about it too much.

They collapse to the ground as Tommy stumbles forward. Behind him, the other three seem to jolt out of it as Niki jerks back, dropping by Wilbur’s feet in the snow. Ranboo quickly follows suit, shaking his head as if to clear a haze.

“I’m sorry,” Tommy repeats, voice hoarse.

It's only then does he get hit with strange thoughts. Ones of pleading, of anger, of depression. They're not his - he knows his own thoughts - but they're strong and potent.

It seems Wilbur can- Tommy's breath stutters in his throat - could catch glimpses of peoples memories, of their emotions. That's Tommy's ability now.

"I'm so sorry," he repeats.

They look up and Tommy is met with identical stares of horror and sorrow. He can't fix this, he has no healing ability apart from the way life courses through his veins.

He cannot save Wilbur.

Do they realise what he is now? Do they finally see?

He is no boy, no human boy that was tainted by the darkness. He was born a spider, deadly but small, needing to be trained to weave his webs.

He's a monster, one that Russian children are told about to make sure they're obedient.

"Watch out," parents coo, "if you do not eat your vegetables, if you do not sleep at your bedtime, a Huntsman Spider will be after you."

He is a cold-blooded killer, a Huntsman Spider of the Red Room. He has killed more people than he can remember, knows the feeling of warm blood on his hands, his face, more than he knows the warmth of hugs.

He is dangerous and deadly and he's added another to his ledger of red.

A ledger that was already dripping- gushing red.

"He didn't have a choice," Niki speaks before any of them can. Her voice is low and strained, tears in his eyes. "None of us ever had a choice."

"Wilbur is dead," Phil hisses back and then he's removing his plague's mask, showing blood-shot blue eyes, a pain burning across his face. "My son is dead."

Tommy chokes. "I'm sorry--"

"Don't," Techno hisses, also forgoing his mask, hand in Wilbur's hair.

Behind them, shots are fired as George takes down the remaining guards. They barely flinch, choosing instead to look at Wilbur.

Tommy feels cold.

There's an ice curling up from his feet, freezing his veins, chilling him. The pain is numbing, becoming something distant. He is becoming numb, frozen, heart turning to ice.

Did Wilbur feel this as he fell into the snow? Did he sense the chill or was death quick?

He's floating again, like when he was triggered. Lost in his mind, lost in the knowledge that he's killed his brother.

Tommy has killed Wilbur.

He thought he couldn't die.

He was wrong.

It's only when he hears a car's engine does he look up from Wilbur's still face, trying to memorise it, fearing Wilbur's name will be forgotten from his mind like the other's he's killed.

Dream appears at his side, shadowed by George and Sapnap. They shift to block him, Sapnap reaching for his hand. He doesn't take it. He can't feel his fingers.

He can't feel anything anymore.

They watch as the car pulls up and none other than Schlatt steps out.

George has his gun trained on him before he can open his mouth. "We saw you use a trigger before," he says, voice firm, hiding Tommy, knowing Tommy is in no state to defend himself. Why should he? He's killed his brother. "If you try again, I'll kill you."

Schlatt grins, even as he looks down at Wilbur's body. "Oh no," he drawls and then looks up. "No need. I'd hope we could be business partners considering--"

A wolf howl makes them all turn to see the woman approach. With long hair as dark as night and eyes like shining stars, she walks bare foot in the snow, a dangerous grin to her lips.

The woman. Tommy blinks at her. His heart is still frozen. He does not move even as Sapnap shifts so that Tommy is hidden on both sides.

Phil still has Wilbur in his lap. The rest huddle around them as Niki stands to block Wilbur from view.

She merely glances at Eret before looking back at Schlatt. "Oh, really?" She says to Schlatt. "You didn't think I was serious about swapping over my assets?"

Schlatt's face turns from pleased to angered quickly. "What?"

The woman rolls her eyes, the wolves at her heels turning away from her. "The rules were simple: we stay away from you, you stay away from my spiders."

"You promised me I would take over--"

She tuts. "Just because you have some of our files and threatened to expose us, doesn't mean I'm going to roll over for you. You should've taken the deal while you could."

"You tried to kidnap my niece!" He shouts.

“And you thirsted for more power like the greedy man you are.” She narrows her eyes. “You grew cocky. I don’t suppose you remember the man on your way to the airport when you left Russia, the one with the burns?”

All of the agents tense bar Tommy at the implication. Corpse can influence anyone with a touch. Tommy wants Corpse to touch him now, to let his mind drift, to let Tommy die.

Tommy doesn’t want to live in a world without Wilbur.

Schlatt doesn’t have the same knowledge as his face twists in confusion. “What the fuck do you mean?”

“Everything that’s happened to you, we know about because we made you do it,” she says with a sharp grin as Schlatt’s face falls. “The alcoholism. Turning on your family. Every single Hero incident report came right back to us. We simply... hinted at what we needed and you complied. In this state you’re weak.”

“How fucking dare-“ Schlatt says but she waves him off.

“You shot my best Huntsman,” she speaks over him, “so I’d like to return the favour.”

Tommy tenses as she looks to him. The ice of his heart cracks as he comes to a horrible understanding. She’s wearing that hungry smile again and Tommy shakes under the weight of it.

“Wipe it out,” she breathes and Tommy is turning to Schlatt before he can stop himself, raising his arm and pulling the trigger, numbly. “Now he’ll never know that his nephew was the one trying to kidnap his niece.”

Schlatt’s eyes are wide in shock as he falls and Tommy throws the gun at George, spinning to the woman in panic. Dream has tensed, swallowing as he stares at the now dead body and Tommy realises in that split second the woman is referring to him. Dream’s uncle is Schlatt because of the mission where he was sent to kidnap his sister.

“Please, don’t,” he begs, then turns his voice to honey and commands, “don’t make me kill someone else.”

She laughs, head thrown back. “Oh, Theseus. Your abilities don’t work on me. Not when I was the one to create them.”

“We can kill you,” Dream says, the first time he’s spoken. It sounds like the ice crawling in Tommy’s veins and she laughs harder.

“Nothing can kill Life.”

Tommy blinks at the sudden swarm of emotions. Sadness and sorrow, anger and acceptance: they burn through him, leaving him heaving and tripping over his own feet. Sappnap grabs him to steady him.

A ringing starts as he tries to draw in breath, blood pounding in his ears.

“Schlatt,” he hisses and the woman hums.

“Can control the emotions around him,” she agrees. “Huntsman aren’t weak, Theseus. Control it.”

“Fuck off,” he snarls and is hit with a wave of utter desperation and regret, amusement and anger rolling off of her.

He crumbles in Sapnap’s hold, trying to push it away. Only as his own desperation grows, a cycle appears. He pushes it away, he’s hit with a wave of their emotions, he tries to push it away, he’s hit with their emotions.

Sapnap curls his arms around him. “Focus on me,” he breathes, enveloping him in warmth. “Just focus on me, Tommy.”

Tommy grips him and focuses on Sapnap. He focuses on his warmth, on the calm of his emotions. He pushes out, almost feeling the relaxed way his heart beats.

“Good,” Sapnap says, arms holding him close.

“I know you.” Tommy hears over the roar of his own thoughts. Tilting his eyes, he sees Phil staring straight at the woman. “You’re Kristin’s sister, Clara.”

The woman scoffs, eyes narrowed. “Ah, Philza. The husband.”

Phil rises on shaky legs, eyes pleading. “I can’t contact her but could you- please could you-“

The woman’s smile turns dangerous. “Oh? I assume that’s your son, then. Is she not saving him like she promised? She does that: break her promises.”

“I don’t know what you-“ Phil tries to speak but the woman waves him off.

“You took everything from me,” she hisses, eyes frenzied. “And if she’s not willing to protect you, I can finally fulfil my revenge.”

She steps forward and with flick of her hand, Dream, George, Sapnap and Tommy and pulled forward. There’s an unnatural tug at his chest, a summoning. Tommy is removed from Sapnap’s grip as they form an orderly line behind her. He can’t fight it, can’t resist.

Ranboo is shaking again and Niki has her head in her hands as she kneels in the snow. She must be trying to fight the pull.

Tommy knows one thing for certain, he was correct in his assumptions about leaving their hoods down.

Even if Eret remains unconscious in the snow, the point remains the same.

The family before him are not leaving here alive.

Chapter End Notes

I AM SO SORRY!!!

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

IM STILL SORRY!

TW// blood, injury, major character death, dissociation, past abuse, past brainwashing, violence, suicidal ideation, past suicidal intentions, brief mention of human experimentation, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The woman's control is a strange thing. Tommy isn't hazy the way he would be if he were under a trigger. Instead, it's the sensation of being tethered to someone, like a leash on a dog.

"My spiders will tear you apart," she continues, a wild look to her eyes. "They were created for destruction--"

The sky floods black.

Tommy draws his eyes away from Phil and looks up. The woman falls silent, body locked and fingers twitching violently.

Cawing starts as through the snow clouds, thousands of crows fly over. The ground shakes and rips apart as a woman, who looks almost identical to the woman, steps out. Black hair but dark eyes. There are no stars in her gaze, just darkness.

"Oh, sister," the other woman says, dark eyes burning as she takes in Wilbur's still body. "This stops now."

The woman snarls. "Kristin," she breathes, voice dripping contempt. "How quaint of you to show up."

"These are children," the other woman - Kristin - hisses. "These are my children--"

Kristin. The one he tried to speak to because according to Dream she could kill the woman.

So if the woman is Life, this must be Death.

It makes sense why she would appear now, what with Wilbur's death. For every Death God, the only way to summon, is through sacrifice.

Tommy is bracketed by his brothers, standing an inch behind them from where they've pushed themselves to be in front.

Phil stands in front of Wilbur, Techno beside him as Ranboo and Tubbo remain behind them. The buzz-cut man is sitting before Niki, lowly speaking to her.

Tommy can't help but look to Wilbur.

Death is here and yet he is not rising, he's not breathing. Why isn't he? Why isn't he waking up?

"Your children?" The woman spits. "Which ones? The ones you ignored passing through the veil? The one behind you? That one you let die--"

"Why?" Kristin says and there's a desperation, an anger that's being slowly replaced by sadness. "Why are you doing this? All because I fell in love?"

The woman laughs but there's something feral about it, something dark and twisted and dangerous.

Tommy realises in that second where they are: alone in endless plains of snow. Schlatt is dead and Eret is unconscious. Wilbur is dead and Tommy only has his brothers beside him.

They're grossly outnumbered if something goes wrong. Especially as it seems they can, in fact, die.

The woman whistles, loud and long, and Leslie appears from the rubble of the ruined Room behind them. Tommy tenses as her eyes remain blank. He didn't even hear her approach.

She looks to the woman, who nods, and then clasps her hands together. Slowly, she spreads her arms wide and the air ripples around them, opening up a portal to a different location. The air shimmers and glitters as the snowy background changes.

That's when Tommy sees the outside of the facility and Toast standing at the centre of the rest of the agents and recruits. Tommy eyes Corpse, who blinks down at Schlatt's body with a frown.

Tommy can pick up their confusion, their diluted fear. Mostly, he can feel the sheer desperation and concern from Kristin, while Phil oozes pain and sorrow.

He blinks, swallows, skips over Sapnap's boiling anger and confusion and focuses on George's calm.

"Why?" The woman mocks as they pour through. "Because we had rules and you broke them. So meet my children."

Tommy doesn't understand what's happening.

The agents spill out to stand behind her as the younger recruits - god, they're children, scared, small children - stand behind them. Corpse's eyes are burning as he steps beside her,

staring with an almost savage grin at Eret's unconscious form.

Back when Tommy first heard of Corpse's ability, he always hoped Corpse would be the one to kill him. Corpse would make it easy, quick. With his ability, Tommy wouldn't feel any pain.

Now, though, at Corpse's stare, Tommy realises while Corpse can take pain, he could also hand it out.

There's a reason he's standing far from Eret, the woman between them.

There's also a reason Schlatt lays in the snow, reeking of alcohol and ambition.

Kristin's eyebrows raise. "You can't kill me, Clara."

"No," the woman says with a sick grin. "Balance must be maintained but I have the most powerful children in the world. These are the best of the best."

The woman turns to Tommy, still half-hidden behind his brothers, and that's when he suddenly realises.

His memories of her are faint but he does remember her. He remembers the lessons and the chair and fighting back until he couldn't anymore.

Tommy's memories of her grow stronger after he killed the boy with the red wings.

After he proved he absorbs the abilities of the person he kills.

And the proof lies in the snow, a bloody bullet hole in Wilbur's forehead.

Tommy can kill immortals.

His eyes widen and his throat closes up. "No," he hisses, panicked and terrified. He's absolutely terrified. He hasn't felt fear like this since he was a child. His brothers all twitch as Phil releases a low chirp of distress. "Please, don't. Please."

"I've been waiting a long time for you, Theseus," she breathes. "Now it's time to prove that you're the best. Take your rightful place as my perfect weapon."

There's that tugging sensation again. Tommy turns and steps beside George. They're all in rows, all with their chins raised, hands behind their backs.

Tommy can't move. This is worse than the triggering. This is being stuck in his own mind screaming as his body is controlled.

"What are you doing?" Kristin asks, panic in her tone and the woman laughs.

"I gave them eternal life," she explains. "Their very cells are mine. They're my weapons, my spiders and soon, sister, they'll rip you apart. I don't need to kill you, not when I can get my

Huntsman to absorb your power. Not when I know he can kill you just like how he killed your son.”

Then, forced forward by the woman’s control, Tommy starts walking straight for Kristin.

He’s in his classic Huntsman gear, they all are. Eret and the woman wants them seen, wants them to be noticed. There are throwing stars and daggers in his boots. He has a thigh holster on and George may have his other gun, but Tommy is still wearing a shoulder holster, filled with another gun and two knives.

They’re all in the same black trousers, boots and under-body armour, built like Kevlar to stop bullets and blades. Some have the jackets with the hoods, some don’t.

Corpse puts on his mask that covers the burns of his face. Dream slots on his smiley-face mask. George pulls down his goggles.

They’re a terrifying sight, an army that’s built to destroy armies individually.

Leslie and her portals, her forcefields. Tina and her ability to control metal. Toast and being able to soul-read. Brooke’s luck. Rae’s energy manipulation. Sykunno and his fire and ice. Jack and surviving any wound, being able to teleport short distances. Minx’s telekinesis. Corpse’s influence.

Sapnap and his fire, his enhanced healing. George’s way with weapons and being able to always hit his targets. Dream’s elemental manipulation.

Tommy and being able to resist any power, absorbing the powers of the people he kills.

The boy with the wings, all those years ago. He was seen as the best, the brightest until his lack of flock led to his death. Tommy stole that, believing he simply inherited his wings but Wilbur’s death proves that theory wrong.

Tommy inherited more than just the boys wings.

Tommy can kill immortals.

He shakes as he studies the younger recruits, not knowing what their powers are, just that they’re here to prove themselves, here to kill and Tommy knows how this will go.

Phil may have death on his side but even he can’t survive all of them. Not if they join forces. Not if Corpse gets his hand on him. Not if Tommy has the ability to kill him.

Tommy meets Niki’s eyes. She’s clearly being tugged by the same force but the man Tommy doesn’t know is tugging her forehead against his. Her fists are clenched but she isn’t moving, isn’t responding the way the rest of them are.

Tommy latches onto that.

He can fight this. Just like how he was able to resist his triggers. He can fight against this.

Tommy was free once and he doesn't want to be that scared boy again, complying because that's his only choice. He may have killed Wilbur but Eret is unconscious. The only problem is the woman-

Tommy blinks back to consciousness when he finds Tubbo before him, a knife at his throat.

Tommy's knife at his throat.

There is no fear on his face. There's simply determination. His antennae are high and his wings are oddly still. He is still not a match for Tommy though and he has no intention of slitting Tubbo's throat.

But the tugging is back and he can sense the emotions flooding from Tubbo. No fear, not even mild concern. Just trusting, just acceptance.

Tommy swallows. "Please don't make me do this."

Tubbo sets his shoulders. Tommy watches almost detachedly as Phil pushes Kristin back, Techno blinking from Wilbur's body to the approaching agents to where Tubbo stands with Tommy's knife at his neck. Their only escape is the cars, parked past Schlatt's body.

But Tina's hand is twitching, prepared to bend metal and Rae's hands are glowing and Sykunno is making the snow shift around their feet.

Tommy can feel the panic pour from them, can feel the odd calm of the agents behind him.

"I trust you," Tubbo says. "You're not going to kill me."

Ranboo shifts behind him, hand outstretched, ready to intervene. Tommy looks at Tubbo and hisses, "I killed Wilbur."

"You were ordered to," Tubbo replies, calmly. "You've not been ordered to kill me. I trust you, Tommy. You can fight this."

"I can't," Tommy whispers, digging the knife in, watching blood bead up from the skin and trickle down Tubbo's neck.

Tubbo doesn't even flinch. "You can. You're doing it now. You're supposed to be going for Kristin, right? So just cut me down to get to her."

"Tubbo," Ranboo mutters, anxiously looking between them and where Kristin is pushing herself forward. She begins to stalk across the snow to her sister. The agents move as one to block the woman from view.

"I will kill you," Tommy stresses, panicked and terrified.

"I don't think you will, boss man." Tubbo breathes. Carefully, as if to not spook the boy holding a knife to his throat, he gently lifts his hand to grip Tommy's around the handle of the blade.

His eyes are wide but honest, trusting.

Tommy is sent back to all the boys in his class. He doesn't really remember Ranboo apart from his eyes, when he didn't return from Siberia. He does remember Hannah, he remembers the boy he snapped the neck of, the boy with the wings he shot down.

All too young, all children.

And here he is, a Huntsman Spider opposite a boy, opposite a friend. Both still children, faced with the impossible.

"I'm not going to fight you. You're my best friend," Tubbo says, quietly.

The Room taught them many ways how to break free. Duct tape, wire, zip-ties, handcuffs, rope, chains. He's dislocated his thumbs and sliced his skin on razors and knives and broke his wrist from twisting from restraints. Tommy knows how to break free of many things in the name of survival.

And just like that, the bonds holding him in place seem to fade. The leash around his throat tying him to the woman severs, cut in the middle and he startles at the pressure being gone.

There's no tugging sensation, no need to find Kristin and kill her.

There's simply him and Tubbo, facing one another, hands locked around the handle of a knife still hovering over Tubbo's throat.

With the hold over him gone, Tommy knows the only way to end this permanently.

For Wilbur. For his brothers. For the child recruits.

"Tubbo," Tommy breathes, haze fully gone from his mind, everything startling clear, pulling the knife away from his neck. "I want you to tell Phil and Techno that I'm sorry. I- you're my best friend, too, along with boob-boy. Even if I don't know what that means to have a best friend. I've never had one before."

"Tommy-" Tubbo tries but Tommy shakes his head with a smile.

"Tell Phil he's cool and Techno that I like his hair and Niki that I'm glad she gets to be free." Tommy swallows. "Tell my brothers I'll miss them."

Tommy doesn't know if he will survive this. He doesn't know what's going to happen.

He killed Wilbur so he should be able to do this, especially if the woman believes he can kill Kristin.

A different type of fear floods his veins.

It feels like warmth, like bathing in the sun, like standing on a cliff and opening arms wide. It feels like the swoop over a stomach when standing on an edge, like the taste of rain, like the buzz of static before a storm hits. It feels like waiting for the inevitable.

The fear tastes oddly like freedom.

Tommy turns, swaps the knife for a gun. He doesn't notice what's happening around him-

(Techno is forcing Phil back and Ranboo is grabbing Tubbo, teleporting them to stand beside a car. Niki and Jack are back to back, guns raised as she tries to talk her fellow Widows down. Schlatt is still and Wilbur's chest does not rise and Eret remains curled in the snow.)

-for all he knows, this could already be for nothing.

But he's going to try.

If not for himself, for Wilbur, who died because of him.

For his brothers.

He's lived for them, now it's time to die for them.

Like Dream on his knees with accepting eyes as Tommy held a gun to his face.

He walks to where Kristin approaches her sister. There is shouting but none of it reaches his ears. There's blessed silence and the steady beat of his heart.

The woman grins as he approaches. He returns the wolf smile.

"Before I do this," he calls. "I wanted to tell you something."

"Yes, Theseus?" She replies, intrigued.

"You asked me what I am: a spider or a fly? I think I worked it out."

She laughs as he gets closer, flicking the safety off his gun. "And?"

He pauses before her. Standing in the Russian snow, the building he grew up in at his side, he thinks this is a fitting place to die. He knows over on the hill, the unmarked graves sit.

He can join his brothers and sisters.

After all, a Phoenix must burn up before they can be reborn from the ashes.

"I told you the answer once," he says, grin still on his face and her face falls with sudden understanding. "I'm the boy with the broom, destroying the web."

Tommy raises his arm and shoots.

Everything happens slowly.

The woman falls as Kristin shouts in alarm. Her eyes are shocked as she crumbles, hole in her skull, between her eyes.

Kristin grabs Tommy as the agents and recruits immediately shake off their own bonds, turning to where Tommy loosely holds his gun. He meets Dream's green gaze and grins.

Then he feels it.

A burning up his spine, like he's decided to take a bath in lava. It bites at his nerves as he wobbles on his feet, gun dropping from his fingers. He tries to breathe through it, tries to remember the training of blocking the pain out.

Then it feels like his very soul is being ripped apart.

He collapses but doesn't hit the snow. He's in someone's arms - Kristin's he realises when he blinks the flood of tears from his eyes.

Every inhale is fire, every exhale is pure pain. His chest tightens and his heart thunders as his blood boils. The skin on his back tears as his wings rip open, blood red feathers flexing wide.

Kristin's eyes are sad when she sees them. He doesn't understand.

"Go to sleep," she breathes. "It's okay. Go to sleep."

Tommy doesn't remember closing his eyes.

He just remembers waking up.

He wakes up slowly, brain melting and buzzing at the way he can still feel the phantom pain of burning inside out.

He still remembers his graduation: remembers being ripped apart and being put back together again. He remembers wishing for death and he remembers surviving-

"You look like shit."

Tommy freezes, opens his eyes to find Wilbur hovering above him. He's in a yellow sweater and wire-frame glasses and there's a white tuft in his hair matching Tommy's and he's smiling.

"Wilbur?" He breathes and Wilbur grabs his wrist, hauls him up and into his chest, arms locking around him.

Tommy numbly squeezes back, dropping his head to Wilbur's shoulder, pushing his face into his neck. He feels real, in his arms. He can hear the steady beat of his heart.

"Hey, Toms," Wilbur breathes and Tommy shoves himself closing.

He doesn't care if this is a dream, he doesn't care if he's dead. Wilbur is here, in his arms and Tommy could cry.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry-“ Tommy repeats, over and over even as Wilbur hushes him.

“It’s okay, it’s alright, breathe,” Wilbur says and Tommy quietens. “C’mon, let’s sit down.”

As Tommy pulls away, he’s suddenly aware of where he is.

Overhead, the ceiling curves and polished stone is beneath his shoes. On one side, along the white-tiled wall, benches sit. On the other side, marked by a yellow line, the platform cuts off and dips, giving way to a tunnel on either side. Stepping closer, Tommy can see railway tracks below. There are red lights instead of yellow and the signs jutting out from the walls have been blurred out.

“We’re in the tube,” Wilbur says, leaning back on a bench.

“Why?” Tommy asks, seeing no entrance or exit. Even the tunnel for the train gives way to an abyss.

“Because this is my limbo,” Wilbur replies, eyes distant. “This is where I came the first time I died.”

Tommy blinks. “What?”

So he is dead?

Wilbur pats the bench and Tommy sits beside him, pulling his knees to his chest. He realises then that his wings are no longer on his back. He’s not even in his Huntsman gear. He’s in jeans and a red t-shirt.

“Phil found Techno first,” Wilbur says, looking off to the tracks. “Phil found him in illegal fighting rings back before the War. Tech’s always been stubborn though. According to Phil, he would ignore him every time he showed up to try and help until he was older. It’s why Techno rarely calls him dad.”

“And this means what, exactly?” Tommy shifts where he sits, tilting his head. “I don’t want a fucking history lesson, Wil.”

Even if he is intrigued about what Wilbur said about the war. He assumes he means the First World War but it could be any.

How old are Techno and Wilbur?

“Hush, child,” Wilbur mutters and Tommy glares at him. “Techno’s power made him deadly and Phil only got his trust because he defended him to the military, who wanted to use him as a weapon. So while the American government is pissed with Phil over Techno, he finds me after the Wars, in the streets, strumming my guitar and luring people in with my voice. I’d-well-“

Wilbur pauses and Tommy lets him. He doesn’t know what’s happening but the silence is oddly comforting.

After days of being in the Room, after shooting Wilbur and watching him die, after killing the woman: the silence is good. It's soothing, not suffocating.

"My mum tried to hide me," Wilbur starts again. "We were poor and my dad had died fighting in France so I would sneak out and busk, getting people to hand over everything in their pockets. But that drew attention. Bad attention from the people my mum was trying to hide me from."

"Who?" Tommy asks, quietly when Wilbur remains still.

"The English government," Wilbur mutters, harsh grin to his lips. "They wanted a weapon, too. One that could fight off another dictator with only his voice. They killed her, locked me in a facility until I compelled myself out. Spent years running, spent years wanting to join her, spent years wanting to burn their homes to the ground."

"But Phil found you?"

"Here," Wilbur says, gesturing to the tracks. "He tried to follow me and I told him to walk into traffic. I thought he was hunting me but he found me again. Here. This time without my guitar, staring at the tracks."

Tommy doesn't need to ask.

He just knows.

"I told Phil I didn't want to go back to those white rooms and he said he had no idea what the fuck I was going on about." Wilbur laughs, humourlessly. "But I could see- see that he wasn't lying. He was projecting, didn't know I could see inside people's heads- wait, did you-"

"I got your powers, remember?" Tommy replies, awkward and blunt and Wilbur hums.

"Oh," he says, nods to himself. "Well, I saw he wasn't lying so I decided, fuck it. Couldn't be worse than being with them, could it?"

"But you've died before?" Tommy asks, drawing him back to the original topic, not wanting to imagine a scared, young Wilbur being led back to a good home.

Tommy wonders how different things would've been if someone had found him and tried to help.

"Phil is immortal. I think he's been around since Viking times but he's unsure, his memories tend to blur. Kristin turned him into a reaper when he fought in her name on a battlefield and died. She made him immortal but to be like him..."

"You have to die first," Tommy says, the pieces fitting together and Wilbur nods.

"Techno said his limbo was a blood-soaked battlefield where he had to farm potatoes-"

"That's so fucking weird," Tommy interrupts and Wilbur snorts.

“Yeah, that’s Techno for you. But as I was saying, child,” he says, jabbing Tommy in the side, who slaps his hand away, “I’ve died before when Tech and I took over Spain and I got blown up-“

“What the fuck,” Tommy breathes and Wilbur starts wheezing.

“Yeah, mumza wasn’t too pleased.”

Tommy sighs, leans back. “So I’m dead?”

“No,” Wilbur says. “This is limbo. It isn’t the afterlife. You’re between life and death.”

Tommy doesn’t dare look up as hope bursts in his chest. “So,” he whispers, clears his throat. “You’re not dead?”

“No, Toms,” Wilbur replies, voice soft as an arm tugs Tommy into Wilbur’s chest. “You killed me but I’m not dead.”

“You didn’t wake up,” he chokes out and Wilbur squeezes him tighter.

“I’m here as long as my body needs to heal,” he informs. “Although I’ve never been here this long for a head wound, so I don’t know why I’m still here.”

Tommy has a pretty good guess.

One that involves a boy with red wings.

But he doesn’t know how to fix it.

He killed the boy and stole his abilities and now he can’t bring Wilbur back, which means he’ll be stuck here for eternity.

The thought makes Tommy blink back tears as he tries to choke down his sob. He truly is a monster, isn’t he?

“Toms?” Wilbur asks, spinning him and Tommy can only look at him with bloodshot eyes.

“I’m so fucking sorry,” he hisses and Wilbur tugs him back to his chest, holding his face to his neck. He grips Wilbur’s yellow sweater with his fists.

“Shhh,” Wilbur breathes. “It’s okay. I’m not angry or upset. You were made to do this, Tommy. It’s okay.”

Tommy just shakes and can’t hold the tears as he cries into Wilbur’s neck.

He’s stolen Wilbur from his family, cursed him to this endless limbo.

How long before Wilbur goes mad? How long before he begs for Kristin to take him to the afterlife?

All he wants is for Wilbur to be alive. He would trade his life for Wilbur's instantly if it meant he could live. So he cries and grips Wilbur and begs for Wilbur to be okay even when he knows he won't be.

"I'm the reason," Tommy breathes into the sweater as he sniffles, tears falling onto Wilbur's skin. "I can- can kill immortals."

Wilbur doesn't stop petting Tommy's hair. "Why do you think that?" He asks, softly.

"Because I could kill you and I killed- killed him in the Room and now you're here and--"

"Tommy," Wilbur says, "even if you're the reason I'm here. I'm still not angry or upset. Niki's been explaining the triggering process - you were made to do it. I should be apologising for being such a dick--"

They both still at the sound of the tracks shifting and the whirring of an approaching train. Clicking and buzzing, Tommy lifts his head to see a single carriage train pull up, doors groaning open.

"What?" Tommy asks and Wilbur stands, pulling him up and towards the doors, away from the platform.

"C'mon," he says with a grin. "This means we get to go back."

Tommy freezes inside, hand instinctively latching onto the grip rails. The doors slide, closing and Tommy blinks at a grinning Wilbur. He uses his other hand to wipe away his tears.

"What?" He asks again and Wilbur starts to speak but his voice is droned out by the sound of the train moving.

Tommy doesn't remember closing his eyes.

He just remembers waking up.

Chapter End Notes

Oooooooooooooo ;)

Some background on Wil, Techno and Phil!

Thoughts???

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

Some explanations ;)

TW// suicidal ideation and thoughts, brief mention of a suicide attempt, blood and injury, gore, violence, past child abuse, past abuse, past brainwashing, child death mention, past child trafficking mention, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He wakes slowly.

The first thing he notices is the grass under his palms. He blinks his eyes open and hastily shuts them at the blinding light of the sun. In the Room, the training for sleep deprivation was like that: bright lights that flickered on and off randomly to stop sleep.

He moves his hands and digs his fingers into dirt. Slowly, he sits up, wincing at the light burning into his retinas and frowns at what he sees.

He's not in Russia, cradled in snow and ice. He's not in Wilbur's limbo. No, he's alone. Wilbur's no where in sight.

He's in a field. A wildflower field.

It's almost like he's in his mind, back in that forest, quiet and calm and still.

Spanning what looks like miles, the flowers rise above him in multiple colours, all being different species clustered together in groups. He can spot tulips and poppies, lavender bushes and daffodils.

It's beautiful. His breath catches at the sight.

Looking up, he can see a rising mountain, disappearing up into the clouds. If he strains his ears he can hear a slow trickle of water and when he turns, the field is backed by a thicket of oak trees.

He stands and grins. Fluttering in the lavender, bees buzz to one another, dancing between the petals. If he looks up, he can see birds squawk to each other in flight and he's surprised there's no ache in his back. There's no discomfort, no phantom pain, no burning.

There are wasps and beetles and spiders and Tommy can even spot a few dragonflies, some ladybirds clustered together on petals.

Somewhere near the mountain, he can see cows and horses, a few sheep. One of them has blue wool.

And there, in front of him, is a Strelitzia flower, known as the Bird of Paradise. Orange and purple petals arranged to look like a crane. These flowers symbolise freedom and immortality.

He knows instantly that something's wrong.

He asks, out loud, "am I dead?"

Because Wilbur isn't here and he's somewhere too peaceful.

Kristin appears before him within a blink of his eyes. Her hair is long and black, her eyes dark but warm. She looks so much like the woman and yet not. The woman always looked cold. Kristin doesn't.

She looks like she gives good hugs.

"No," she replies, hands reaching out for the flowers, fingertips brushing over the petals. "Did Wilbur not explain? You're currently in an in between state."

Tommy blinks at her and then it clicks. "My limbo."

"Yes." She smiles and then holds out her hand. He hesitantly takes it, shaking it once. "Kristin. Better known as Lady Death. Or Phil's wife."

Tommy's eyes widen. "You're married to Philza Minecraft, the best of men?"

She laughs and Tommy's proud of himself for making her happy. "Yes, I am."

"Cool." He says. "I'm Tommy."

Her smile is fond. "I know."

He gestures to the field around him. "My limbo."

Kristin looks around and says, "your limbo. It's beautiful."

"Peaceful," he adds. "Safe."

Nothing like Wilbur's. Here, the Room does not exist. Here, Tommy can sunbathe and hug the cows and not have to worry about fighting.

Her eyes are soft and sad as she nods. She stretches her hand out again and Tommy takes it. She pulls him through the dirt paths between the flowers, towards where the water grows louder.

“This is different to Wilbur’s,” he says and then frowns at her. “Why? Also how?”

“Why? Limbos take on your state of mind when you die.” She informs, weaving through flowers, her long dress flowing at her ankles. “Wilbur was in a bad place when we met. You, on the other hand, were at peace when you died. You accepted it.”

“And Wilbur is alive, right?” He asks, quickly, not letting himself think over why he’s so quick to accept death. “The train-“

“Yes,” she smiles. A crow flies from the mountain and perches on her shoulder. “He’s alive. You brought him back.”

At that, he stills and she stops. “I- what?”

“When you kill someone, by absorbing their power you absorb their life force,” she says, quietly. “But with Life running through your veins... you can heal. You can give that life force back with the right intention.”

“You don’t sound sure,” Tommy says and her lips quirk. “I mean, am I a God or something?”

“Not yet,” she says and that catches him off guard, makes him blink. “You need to mature and the powers that come with being Life will slowly creep up on you but as for not being sure? I’m not. My sister and I never discussed what abilities we had. So long as there was balance, it didn’t matter.”

“So Life could be giving me like super strength or something fucking cool like-“

“I don’t know,” she says but she’s laughing and Tommy can’t help but grin back. “At least you know you can heal.”

Tommy smirks. “Nice. People are going to have to WAP to me now.”

“What?” She chokes out and Tommy laughs.

“Worship and pray,” he replies and she grins at him. “Anyways: how did I survive? I’m not aware of the extend to my power absorbing shit but stealing a God’s ability should’ve killed me right?”

She hums. “Well, Life is flowing through your veins. You already had a form of it, it’s why absorbing my sister’s power didn’t instantly turn your body to dust. She’s been diluting herself to make you all immortal.”

He nods as they begin to walk again. They pass through the rows of colour, sun on his face. He feels light, no aches or pains.

“Why can’t I feel my wings?”

“Limbo stills everything. This place exists between time and space. In your own limbo, you can’t access any of your abilities.”

“But I could still heal Wilbur in his?” Tommy asks and Kristin shrugs.

“You’re a lot more powerful than you think but here,” she pauses, gives him a sad smile. “Here, you don’t want your powers. So they don’t exist. Wilbur likes his abilities. You don’t.”

“Oh,” Tommy murmurs.

She’s not wrong. Tommy has always wondered if having powers, having a normal life would’ve been better, nicer, safer.

They walk towards the stream, his hand in hers. Following the clear blue water, they walk along the bank of pebbles and rocks, frogs atop lily pads and fish swimming within. They walk in silence until they reach the end of the stream, as it abruptly stops. Rocks leaving the water to collect in a shallow pool.

Before him, it’s all sharp grey rock. The sun doesn’t touch here, where the mountain has curved around this edge.

Because it is an edge. Tommy leans forward to see that the rock suddenly opens up to nothingness. Just a sheer drop down. They’re on a cliff of some kind.

“I don’t understand,” he says and she squeezes his hand.

“You have a choice,” she says, quietly. “You can stay here in this limbo. It will change if you wish it to but your body in the real world will remain still, waiting for a decision.”

He nods. “What are my other options?”

“You can come back and be Life,” she says, “but I don’t- it may not work. You’re young and your body is still maturing. You might not survive that much power-“

“If I become Life,” he asks, interrupting her, “does that mean I have to, like, make life or some shit?”

She laughs. “No. Life is already working in the world without much need of influence. If something comes up, I’ll be sure to help and assist. But for most of it, I will be away-“

“Away?” He asks and her eyes are distant as she looks into the distance.

“I can rarely see my husband because of my job, let alone my children.” She squeezes his hand. “I will try to help but I may not be there as much as you need.”

He hums. “And if I don’t become Life?”

Her smile is sad once again. “You die. Your body will crumble to dust and my sister will regain her power.”

Tommy swivels, eyes wide. “She can’t- she will- if she- you can’t-“

“Easy,” Kristin says, resting a hand on his shoulder. “Breathe. I will not let my sister - if it were to come to that - ever harm any of you, or anyone else, ever again.”

Tommy breathes a sigh of relief. “Good. That’s good.”

Kristin nods and then looks back out to the sheer drop before them. “You can stay here as long as you’d like - time works differently here - but when you decide, you will need to jump.”

Tommy pauses. “Jump?”

“It’s a leap of faith,” Kristin explains. “To be Death, one must sacrifice life. To be Life, one must sacrifice death. You will jump and your intentions will either allow you to pass beyond the veil or you’ll wake up as Life.”

“That’s terrifying,” he mutters. “And goes against all of my training. I don’t even think I can consider suicide.”

She squeezes his hand, eyes soft. “Here, you’re free to make your own choice. I will not judge you for your actions.”

Tommy nods, looks out.

He could walk away, sit amongst the flowers, cuddle up to the cows. He could spend days by the stream or climbing the trees or rolling around in the dirt.

He could spend centuries debating the answer but he already knows it.

Back there, his brothers are waiting for him. Back there, Wilbur is waiting for an apology because Tommy can never say enough. Back there, his instincts pull him towards Phil.

Tommy has come to terms with his death. He wanted to die during graduation. He wanted to die when he sat trying to pull the trigger against his temple while in his apartment, Dream talking him down.

Tommy knows death.

He’s not a good person. He’s a monster. His ledger is dripping, gushing red. He’s killed and killed and killed. So many dead, so few names, some faces blurry or forgotten.

Tommy is a Huntsman Spider.

He does not feel. He is not weak.

Tommy is also human.

He knows fear but he also knows love. He knows the feel of Sapnap’s warm hugs and Dream’s hair ruffle and George’s grin. He knows what it’s like to be a part of the Minecraft’s family.

He will either die or live as Life.

Tommy doesn't believe in fate or destiny. His life has been horrid, a thing no one should ever go through.

But he's survived.

Above all else, Tommy is a survivor.

He takes a deep, shuddering breath. "A leap of faith," he murmurs and then lets go of Kristin's hand.

How ironic: Theseus approaching a cliff. Only this time, he will not be pushed, he will fall of his own volition.

She blinks at him in a panic as he walks to the edge. "Aren't you going to wait and make a decision?"

"The Room taught us to plan but not in excess," he recites as the stone clicks under his feet. "It will either work or go wrong. If it goes wrong, work around it."

"Tommy--"

Tommy pauses to look at her and smiles. "I've had worse odds," he says. "I either die or I live."

Like that, it's simple.

"Tommy," Kristin says, voice bleeding panic and concern. "Please, at least think about it--"

"I have, big K." He says, shrugs.

He can't make himself jump like this, looking down at the abyss.

He steps back, hears her breathe a sigh of relief as he joins her side again. "Was Wilbur alone before I spoke to him?" He asks, the question bugging him, something he needs to know before he jumps. "How did I even get to his limbo?"

"We had a discussion," she says with a fond grin. "He's my adoptive son, after all. I like catching up with him. As for you showing up: you're more powerful than you think and with Life in your veins and Wilbur being your intention, that's how you got there. Just like how I can go to the souls I've reaped."

"Are they all immortal?" He asks, the question once again one he wants to know, and she nods.

"Phil, Techno and Wil, yes. Phil's waiting until Tubbo and Ranboo are older before they commit to this."

Tommy hums. "He's giving them a choice? Cool. That's nice."

Then, before Kristin can shoot him any pitying look, or before he can talk himself out of it, Tommy starts running.

He hears her gasp as he hurtles for the edge. For a brief moment, he wishes for his wings. The wings he normally actively despises, the wings he stole from an innocent boy. He wishes they were here to stop him from plummeting, to help him soar.

But they're not.

Instead, Tommy reaches the end of the rock and propels himself forward.

For a second, he's suspended in the air.

His heart pounds frantically in his chest, his ears ring. He begins to fall.

Tommy shuts his eyes, spreads his limbs wide like they taught him in the Room when they jumped out of a plane and learnt to skydive - to catch the air - and drops.

His stomach flips, his eyes tear and bile climbs up his throat.

He thinks of his brothers' faces. He thinks of Tubbo and Ranboo, Wilbur and Phil, Techno and Quackity, Charlie and Niki, Punz and Purpled.

He doesn't mind dying so long as they're safe and alive.

Tommy falls and falls and falls.

Dream watches as Tommy collapses, watches Kristin catch him and moves without thinking. He doesn't consider the threats of the family behind him, not even the threat of Eret in the snow or the woman dead next to Tommy.

All he cares about is getting to his little brother.

"Go to sleep," Kristin says and Tommy's eyes are closing and by the time Dream gets within a couple of metres of the boy, he's laying in the snow alone. Kristin has disappeared from sight.

Dream's knees hit the ice cold ground as he rips his mask from his face. A porcelain smiley-face crashes into the snow. He cradles the boy's head, fingers pressing at Tommy's neck.

Only to find no pulse.

"No," he hisses, shifts to start pressing at his chest. One hand atop the other, a regular, hard beat to start his heart. "Not again, please- fuck, not again."

"Dream?" George asks, dropping beside him and Dream counts in his head, keeping a steady pressure. "Sapnap, we need your heat. Rae! Bring the car around-"

“Dream,” Corpse says, towering above them, mask still covering half of his face. “He’s not dead.”

“Like fuck he isn’t,” Dream snaps back as Sapnap drop by Tommy’s head. He presses his hands to the side of Tommy’s neck, boiling heat melting the snow beneath his head and torso.

“He’s dreaming,” Corpse says, deep voice honest. “He’s not blocking me.”

At that, he stills, looking up and is met with a dark but truthful gaze. “You can- can sense him?”

“Hard not to when he’s normally shut off from me,” Corpse mutters, dropping to a crouch. “His heart might not be beating but-“ Corpse twists his hand and Tommy’s finger twitches, then curls before straightening again. “He’s not dead.”

“I die all the time and it never sticks,” Jack interrupts their moment, katana resting over his shoulder as he grins at them. “Maybe he’s like me: a total badass.”

Corpse snorts and Sapnap looks up at Jack. “What should we do?”

Jack shrugs. “Keep him from the cold. If he wakes up, healing frostbitten limbs is gonna suck ass. I like when I only have to heal from one thing. It’s never fun when it’s a gunshot wound, a dismembered arm and my eyeball is rolling around.”

“Gross,” Sapnap mutters and Jack laughs.

“Have I ever told you about the-“

“We can discuss your healing when Tommy’s heart starts to beat again.” George interrupts as Sapnap flexes Tommy’s wings to curl at his back, lifting him up into his arms.

Before Jack can walk away, George is snapping his hand out, holding his wrist. At the contact, Jack wiggles his eyebrows, smirk tugging at his lips.

“George,” he sings, “we’re in public, please. What will Dream think?”

George rolls his eyes, letting him go. “You’re the one that can escape death so you’re coming with us to make sure if something changes-“

“Yeah, yeah, I got it.” Jack narrows his eyes. “I’m a Huntsman, too. Plus, you’ve got bigger fish to fry what with...”

Jack gestures with his katana at where Toast is blocking the man with the wings. The pink-haired man stands at his shoulder, glaring at Tina as she smirks from Toast’s side.

A car draws up. Rae steps out, opening the door for Sapnap to slide in with Tommy, throwing the keys to Dream.

“Why does he seem familiar?” Rae asks as Jack climbs up onto the hood.

“Angel of Death,” Dream says and Rae’s eyes turn calculating.

“We do need someone to help move the recruits.”

George’s eyebrow raises. “Tommy did say his weakness is small, scared children.”

Rae smiles. “Then Toast and I can get them out.” She looks to Corpse. “Would you like to do the honours?”

Corpse isn’t next to them, though. He’s crouching beside Eret’s unconscious body. With a scarred hand, Corpse grips the side of Eret’s neck.

“I’m good,” he says to Rae, a deep satisfaction colouring his words. “I’ve got this to take care of.”

Corpse tilts his head and Eret’s eyes open. Together, they rise as one, every move Corpse makes, Eret follows.

“Corpse,” Sykunno calls, dark grin on his otherwise soft face. “Have fun.”

“Oh,” Eret says, speaking for Corpse. “He will. There’s only one way for traitors to die, remember?”

They all share a bloodthirsty grin as Eret and Corpse make their way to a different car. Corpse is quick to root around the pockets of the guard’s George shot earlier.

“We’ll be at the house,” Dream calls, stepping into the driver’s side of the car. Jack shuffles over the hood to the passenger side while George slips in the back.

Corpse and Eret enter the other car while Rae stalks off to meet Toast.

“How is he?” Dream asks, turning the key and putting the car in gear.

“No heartbeat but he’s too warm to be dead.” Sapnap says and Jack grins.

“See? Aw, he’s taking after me. Adorable.”

Dream rolls his eyes but pauses. “Fuck, where even are we? It’s going to take-“

There’s a knock at the window and Leslie is grinning at them. Dream rolls it down and she immediately asks, “where to? Corpse is off to Saint Petersburg.”

Dream didn’t even notice Corpse disappearing but he smiles at her. “Also... also Saint Petersburg?”

“Wow, so unique,” she mutters but she’s still got a grin to her lips. She steps to the front of the car, clasps her hands together and then pulls them apart. A brief shimmer turns into scenery that’s not snow.

Driving through, he shouts, “thank you!”

While Jack laughs, Dream heads to the only safe place he knows.

Wilbur does not wake slowly.

He startles as his heart kickstarts. Blood, stagnant in his veins, is suddenly pushed out and drawn in, heat burning through his chest. His head aches and a bullet falls into the snow from his skull as the skin, sinew and bone knit back together.

Wilbur throws himself forward, gasping as sweet oxygen floods his lungs.

Pins and needles echo through his limbs and he shakes from the cold, fingers flexing in the snow beneath him.

“Wil?” He hears Phil breathe and suddenly there are arms wrapping around him, pulling him into a warm embrace. Wings curl around his back, blocking him from the chill of the wind.

“Fuck, it’s cold,” he hisses and Phil chokes a sob.

“We thought we’d lost you, son,” Phil says and Wilbur pulls his dad closer.

“Never,” he replies. “Where’s Tommy? Is he okay?”

Phil doesn’t respond and when Wilbur looks up to see Techno staring at him with both a relieved and pained expression, he repeats himself. Only Techno remains silent, looking away.

“He collapsed,” Tubbo says, hand gripping Ranboo’s, wings fluttering behind him. “After he shot that woman. It looked- well, I don’t-“

“They were performing CPR before they disappeared with him in a car,” Ranboo says and ice floods Wilbur’s veins.

“Is he-?” He can’t bring himself to finish that sentence. He didn’t question why Tommy would be meeting him in limbo, he was just happy to see him.

A cough has them all spinning, Phil’s wings puffing up to hide Wilbur but the woman standing there doesn’t look a threat. Dark hair, dyed blonde at the ends, eyes warm. However, she’s wearing the same combat gear as the other agents opposite where Wilbur sits in the snow. She’s a Black Widow.

Niki takes a step closer to her, hands at her side, seeing a threat that Wilbur easily dismissed.

In his defence, he never realised Niki was an assassin either.

Or Tommy.

“Hello,” she greets, American accent hiding her Russian heritage. “I’m Rae. I need some help with the children. As for Tommy - I heard you speaking about him - he’s, well, he’s not dead.”

“How?” Techno asks and Rae looks to Niki.

“You’re a Widow, right? Even if I don’t remember you-“

“I remember you.” Niki replies, a little tense but Rae’s smile only becomes more genuine.

“Then you know Corpse?” She asks and when Niki nods, Rae explains, “he can influence him which is, you know, impossible if he were dead.”

Niki swallows, shoulders relaxing. “Oh thank God he’s alive.”

“The kid’s a survivor,” Rae agrees, then looks back at Phil. “Do you think you could help transport these children?”

Wilbur nearly laughs at the look on Phil’s face. He knows the answer before Phil even speaks, they all do because Phil has a bleeding heart and a need to look after any small thing.

“What do you have in mind?” He asks, shifting to pull Wilbur up and the discussions begin.

Wilbur’s simply glad that Tommy isn’t dead.

He doesn’t notice when the body of a woman with a bullet hole in her skull dissolves to ash.

At the original Room, around the back, a courtyard used to sit with a large statue in the centre, depicting Stalin in his glory.

The Room Corpse remembers had a courtyard used for target practice. Tommy destroyed that when he blew up the Room, leaving crumbling buildings and fallen debris.

Not that he really needs a courtyard. He just likes the parallels as he leads Eret into the Peter and Paul Fortress, away from the watchful eyes of the tourists and into the trees.

“I want you aware,” Corpse says, reaching out in his mind for Eret’s, sensing the fear oozing from them. He still keeps Eret from accessing their abilities. “I want you to know that you’re going to die in the way you had us kill our friends.”

“You weren’t friends,” Eret spits and Corpse rolls his eyes, tugging the hood up higher on his head.

“How would you know?” He asks, frowning at them. “You made us into weapons, tried to make us not feel but we did. We were loyal to each other, just like how a bullet is loyal to a gun. You may have been holding the trigger but none of it would’ve worked without us.”

“What do you want me to say?” Eret asks, glaring even as they have to follow Corpse’s influence. “That I’m sorry? I’m not. I made you strong! I gave you a home!”

Corpse grabs Eret by their throat and slams them into the brick wall. He clicks the safety off of his silenced gun and presses the muzzle to Eret’s forehead.

For a moment, they're both silent. One gaze terrified, the other determined.

"Some of us had homes," Corpse snarls. "Some of us had families. I remember those missions: sneaking into houses and stealing children. As for being strong? We were kids, we didn't need to be fucking strong, we needed to be loved."

"Loved?" Eret scoffs, even as they tremble beneath Corpse's hand. "In this world? No. That's a lie the weak tell themselves. I didn't think you were so weak, Hellion."

Corpse's hand tightens around their neck and he leans in close to murmur, "and I didn't think I had a place in this world. But who needs a place when I have a purpose."

That purpose being to destroy the last remaining leader of the Room. It's a good purpose and Corpse grins at the way Eret's eyes widen in the knowledge that they will be dead before the sun sets.

"You tortured and killed children," Corpse says, slowly, calmly. "I would happily hand you over to a court for justice but you're a fucking weasel- a fucking snake. You'd slither out of it too quickly, too easily. Don't make me make you walk on a broken leg."

Eret gulps, nods. Corpse steps back, waves his hand and Eret once again follows the influence of Corpse's mind, walking ahead.

They get to a smaller courtyard, one not occupied by any tourists even as Corpse can spot a few staff members, some light security.

He waves his hand and Eret walks from the shadows of the wall into the centre, spinning to face Corpse.

"It took eight bullets for Reeth to die," Corpse says, hand tightening on the gun. "I can't quite remember where but I'll try my best."

Shoulder then hip. Calf and ribs. Collarbone and arm. Thigh and finally, finally, Corpse aims for Eret's chest. There are phantom pains ringing through his body but he easily ignores them.

That's the problem with sharing a mind: Corpse sometimes forgets who he is, sometimes feels too much of whoever's mind he holds onto.

The man gurgles where they end up kneeling in the courtyard, blood splattering onto the ground below. White eyes blink up at Corpse and he grins, sick and satisfied.

"You're never going to hurt another kid, motherfucker," he hisses and pulls the trigger.

The bullet goes through Eret's heart and they slump back, wheezing and spluttering, blood dripping from their lips. Between one breath and another, Corpse feels Eret's mind snap away.

Dead.

Eret's dead.

Corpse smiles and places the muzzle of the gun to his temple. He could end it here. He could be free. He's never really been an agent that clings onto life, he's always felt like just a weapon. A means to an end. If he pulls the trigger now, he never has to feel like that again.

Corpse could join Reeth.

But he hears a shuffle from above him and feels a pull from Tommy's mind. Briefly looking over to the link between him and Tommy, he sees a field of wildflowers and smiles.

He removes the gun from his temple, puts it back in its holster. He walks until he finds a security guard and touches the side of his neck. The man freezes.

"Find the body in the courtyard, take a picture and send it to every media outlet you know titled 'Red Room organiser'. Forget you ever had this conversation, that you ever saw me."

Corpse doesn't walk to the car. Instead, he pulls on the connection he has to Leslie, asking for a portal through their link.

It's not his time to die yet. Not when he has a boy to check up on and a few recruits that will need someone to look after them.

In Saint Petersburg, as the snow flutters from the clouds, Tommy slams upright as his wings flare out behind him, gasping for breath.

Dream meets his eyes and grabs his cheeks with cold hands. "If you do that to me again," he hisses, "I'll kill you myself. I can't handle all of these heart attacks."

Tommy blinks and suddenly he's seeing Phil, Techno, Wilbur, Niki, Tubbo and Ranboo staring at him. Oh. His hallucinations that aren't hallucinations. He must be feeling a certain type of way to be able to summon them like this.

Tubbo slumps at the sight of him. "Oh thank god you're alive."

"Tubs?" Tommy whispers, voice hoarse.

Between blinks they're gone and in their stead, Tommy is surrounded by his brothers and Corpse.

Corpse grins at him as Dream pulls him into a crushing hug. "Welcome back to the land of the living, Tommy."

And he's alive!!

Also if you would like to read some background on Corpse and Reeth, please check out:
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/33575620>

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

And we're back to less angst and more comfort!

Also I know this a weird time for me to update but look, you're getting the chapter earlier okay? That's all you need to think about ;)

TW// past child abuse, past brainwashing, child death mention, body horror, kind of gory, poisoning, weaponry, blood and injury, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy blinks around him, every muscle in his body protesting. "What?" He slurs and George hands him a glass of water.

Tommy chugs it as Dream tells him, "you collapsed, Tommy. Your heart stopped beating..."

"Oh," he says, dumbly. "How long?"

He hands George the cup back and turns to bury his face in the pillows. His wings flutter and he groans at the sensation of having them out.

"An hour," Sapnap says and then he's there, running a too-hot hand through his hair. Tommy sighs, soothed by the feeling.

Tommy let's himself have a moment of peace. He's with his brothers, he's alive. He may also be inadvertently summoning the others but he'll focus on that at a later date.

Then he sits up, flexes his wings out and asks, "what now?"

What next? Eret was left unconscious and they're still in Russia and what about the recruits? The woman is dead and Tommy is-

Tommy is Life.

He blinks at that. He doesn't exactly feel different apart from the constant ache in his body, the growing headache.

"Eret's dead," Corpse says with a grin. When Tommy tilts his head in confusion, Corpse continues, "shot them like the traitor they are outside of the Peter and Paul Fortress."

"Nice," Tommy says, lips twitching. Eret is dead. He's free. They're all free. "The recruits?"

“The Angel is dealing with them,” Jack says, appearing from a side room, eating melon from a dagger. “Good to see you up, Tommy. We’re connected now. Don’t worry, you don’t have to call me dad.”

“Oh.” He blinks. “Good to know. Thanks.” He coughs and frowns as Sapnap and Dream wheeze, looks to George. “Phil?”

George nods. “Tina, Toast and Sykunno are with them. The Angel has the money and resources, and according to Rae, Niki - your friend - said she’d look after them. Leslie went and got the remaining red vials to make sure none of us were controlled, even with Eret being under Corpse’s control and then dead. We also used some of them on the recruits to make sure they were free.”

Tommy exhales. “That’s good.”

At least the recruits will get a good home. He knows Niki will fight for them, will try and succeed in getting them the help they need. She mentioned Puffy being a counsellor and as much as Tommy doesn’t want anyone near his mind, the younger ones might need that support.

Support that the older ones can’t give. They don’t know how to be people. Not yet. Maybe not ever.

He’s so engrossed in wondering whether he’ll be able to return to his L’Manberg apartment that he doesn’t notice he’s being stared at.

“What?” He asks, frowning at them.

“Tommy, you’re-“ Dream waves in his general direction, “-you’re glowing.”

Tommy blinks and then thrusts out his hands, staring down at his skin. And yes, if he looks closely at his veins, they’re giving off a golden glow.

“Oh,” he says, staring at his arms with confusion.

“And your feathers are- well, they’re different.” Sapnap says and Tommy snaps his head up and tilts it, making sure to flex his wings to catch a look at them.

At first, he doesn’t see it. They’re still that deep, blood red colour, all of his primaries and secondaries in the right place. But then he notices it. As the brief sunlight through the snow catches on his wings, the light passes over them and it looks like Tommy’s wings are engulfed in flames.

Deep red at the top, blending into fiery orange.

“What the fuck?” He whispers, prodding at his feathers. They ruffle under his attention.

He looks up at his brothers as they watch him and a sudden question hits him. “Where did Kristin go?”

They look between each other and shrug. "One minute she was holding you," George says, "then she vanished."

Well, that's not helpful.

Tommy needs Kristin to explain what's happening to him. He probably should've actually asked more questions instead of impulsively throwing himself from a cliff.

Which means he really needs Phil.

"And where would Phil be now?" He asks, all twitchy and Dream raises his eyebrows, pulling at the scar across his face.

"Probably trying to work out how he's getting a group of undocumented children into America."

Tommy rolls his eyes, flips him off and then sighs. "We need to find Phil."

"Why?" Sapnap groans. "Why not stay here in this lovely apartment that's warm and experience Gogy's amazing cuisine--"

"He's just upset that he's going to have to meet his fiancés' again." George cuts him off and dodges the knife Sapnap throws at him. Jack snaps a hand out to catch it in the air.

"They're going to hate me!"

Jack grins at him, spinning the blade in his hand. "Ooo, fiancés'? I'll happily take your place--"

"I have to speak to my- my mom!" Dream hits back as Sapnap lunges for Jack, who rolls away laughing. "I didn't even think I had a mom!"

"I bet she's--"

"Don't." Dream says and Jack sighs at him.

"You're no fun."

"I have to speak to no one," George says with a grin. Corpse laughs, holds up his hand and George reaches over to high-five him.

"Neither do I!" Jack says and proceeds to slap both of their hands.

As Tommy watches them interact, he can't help but feel worried. He's officially Life, or at the very least, has Life rushing through his veins. When he matures, he'll be a God.

Will his brothers see him differently? He's already been called the ultimate weapon by the woman, which means he outranks Dream now. He's the best Huntsman Spider. Yet Dream doesn't appear to be looking at him any differently.

They will find out sooner rather than later that Tommy is more than what he says he is. He thinks it would simply be easier if he were around people that already know a God. Or, as Phil is, married to one.

“Right,” Tommy groans and then focuses on his connections. He knows he can do it, knows because he saw them earlier.

He thinks of Phil, of the man with beautiful, black wings, of the man that’s like him in so many ways. He thinks of blond hair and warm eyes and-

Between blinks, Phil appears before him looking thoroughly confused.

“Tommy?”

“Hey! You can yell at me in person but first I need to know where you are?” Tommy speaks before Phil can as Dream quietly explains Tommy’s ability to summon people to Corpse and Jack.

“Uh,” Phil blinks at him. “I’m not going to yell-“

“Yeah, yeah. Where, big man?”

“Uh, I don’t- I think it begins with the letter ‘T’ and we’re in Siberia-“

“Tolmachevo?” Tommy asks and Phil nods. “Cool. See you!”

Between blinks, the man is gone and Sapnap is staring at him. “I thought you couldn’t control it?”

Tommy shrugs. “I have new found strength in my abilities.”

And the godliness now running through his veins.

He pushes himself up, flexing his wings out and in so that they rest in a high arch, close to his body. He tugs at the front of his hair and finds there’s still a strip of white.

He has to do this and he’ll do it with a smile.

“Let’s go, boys.”

Theseus only realises he’s been poisoned when his throat burns. Looking down at his meal, he realises the odour is off slightly - something he should’ve noticed, something that he needs to notice next time.

He pushes the bowl away from him, watching the others in the canteen do the same.

He is starving - they are on one meal a day, training their bodies to survive hunger - but he doesn’t want to test the theory of the Room wiping them all out. What’s one hungry night

compared to failing, to dying?

Some of the others clearly don't agree.

A boy with dark hair, the one that sleeps next to Theseus, shovels the broth into his mouth with no regard for the consequences.

Later that night, handcuffed to the bedframe, he watches as the boy beside him writhes, blood pooling from his lips. Theseus turns away and tries to force himself to sleep.

In the morning, three of them are dead.

The hunger doesn't feel that bad after that.

Phil stares at the children sitting outside of the airport and exhales sharply. Niki and Toast have convinced the majority of the staff to just ignore the situation while Wilbur works on getting a plane big enough to carry everyone.

The others - the agents, they called themselves before giving quick introductions - check between the children - recruits, the agents called them but Phil isn't going to call them that, not when they look so small and scared. They hand out water and wrap them up for the cold as Sykunno creates a small fire.

"Can we agree to never come back to Russia?" Techno drawls. "This has been way too stressful."

"I think you just like adopting kids," Ranboo murmurs, hand still firmly linked with Tubbo's after Tommy held a knife to Tubbo's throat.

"Damaged, dangerous kids," Tubbo agrees, looks up at Ranboo, who hunches his shoulders. His entire body is a line of tension.

"I told you," he hisses, "I don't remember. I just- I don't-"

Phil reaches out a hand, lays it carefully on the back of his neck. Ranboo relaxes. "It's alright, mate. We'll work this out when Tommy shows up."

"Let's hope he's more Tommy than Theseus," Techno mutters under his breath.

Not that Phil is going to disagree.

The past weeks have been chaotic to say the least. With Tommy being Theseus and getting shot and the Heroes involving themselves and Wilbur dying-

Phil is going to fix this - his instincts call out for the boy with the wings, with the way he chirped in so much distress - and then he's going to take a much needed vacation. Maybe to the Bahamas.

Niki makes an aborted move as someone approaches from the terminal. Phil turns, wings puffing up only to be met with Mark and a man by his side.

“Mark!” Tubbo calls and waves with his free hand and Mark waves back.

“Hey!” Mark gestures to the man lurking behind him, a smile on his face, brown hair and brown eyes, lean but strong. “This is Ethan.”

“Hi!” Ethan says with a wave.

“So,” Mark says, gesturing to the children. “This all looks very illegal. Anything we can help with?”

“I don’t know if you can,” Phil says but he’s straightening, eyeing Mark with intrigue. “How did you even know we were here?”

Mark smirks at him and something dark flashes over his eyes, his face. Something that has Techno drawing himself straighter, something that has Phil’s wings puffing up.

“Oh,” Mark breathes as Ethan sighs. “I have my ways.”

“See, this is why Amy keeps you in the house.” Ethan waves at them. “You’re doing the creepy thing again and the last time you did that, your viewers thought you were being possessed.”

“Well,” Mark says and Ethan immediately tries to smack him.

Now that Mark is focusing on Ethan, the aura around him isn’t as dark or dangerous. Phil finds himself grinning, the play-fighting reminding him of his sons.

“You’re okay with illegal activities?”

Mark snorts as Ethan laughs into his hand. “I may be wanted by a few organisations,” Mark says with a smirk.

Ethan just winks, turns and shouts, “I remember you! Toast, right?”

The man in question looks over and raises his eyebrows. “Yes? Who are—”

He then freezes and like a switch has been flipped, all of the agents are simultaneously turning to Ethan. They’re all tense, waiting, watching Toast for his reaction.

“You’re dead,” Toast says, slowly. “I watched you die.”

Ethan laughs. “Nope! Still have a heartbeat.”

“How?” Toast hisses and Ethan shrugs.

“Ate the bullets and the frozen ground kept my body stable while I healed.” He shrugs again. “I don’t know. All I know is I crawled out and the building was half-destroyed.”

“What’s happening?” Rae hisses as Sykunno also looks at Ethan with confusion. “Who is he?”

Toast gestures to the others while watching Ethan. “You want the honours?”

“I’m Ethan,” he says, “but Hellion used to call me Reeth. Have you heard of me?”

The reaction is instantaneous. Rae and Sykunno reel back while the other agents - Phil assumes the younger ones even if they all look like they’re in their early twenties - blink at Ethan with wide eyes. Even the children gasp.

Leslie blinks at Ethan and then frowns, head tilting. She takes a step away and clasps her hands together, slowly stretching them out as the air shimmers between her palms.

Tina is the one to say in an awed tone, “you’re a legend.”

“Ten bucks says Corpse cries,” Rae follows up.

“Twenty that he freezes,” Brooke replies.

They clasp hands as Sykunno rolls his eyes.

“Who’s Corpse?” Ethan asks and they all look between themselves.

“Well-“

Something hurtles from between Leslie’s palms and soars upwards before dropping down. Something with large red wings and a cheeky grin.

Phil can feel the chirp in his back of his throat as Tommy flutters to a stop, wings curling at his back. He looks at Mark and Ethan curiously before nervously turning to Phil.

“Please no homicide before I explain myself?”

Phil frowns. “I’m not going to kill you, Tommy.”

He shrugs, looks to Leslie as more agents appear, stepping out from the shimmering air.

“So,” Tommy says and then points at the man with a scar across his face, a man wearing goggles and a man flicking a lighter. Following them, is a man with burns covering one side of his face and a man with katanas strapped to his back. “Those are my brothers. Plus Corpse and Jack. Look, I need to-“

“Corpse?” Ethan asks, looking over at him. Corpse raises his head, titling it as he looks at Ethan.

“Yeah?” He asks in that deep voice. “Who are you?”

As the silence stretches, Tina is the one to say, “Corpse, meet Ethan, although I think you know each other by different names.”

Ethan takes off his jacket and before Phil can convince him the cold of Russia is the unforgiving type, the skin of his chest seems to unzip and his ribs shift. They unlock and reach out, almost like limbs of their own.

Tommy's eyes widen as Corpse's face falls deathly pale. Ethan walks closer and immediately the ribs curl around Corpse in a strange, grotesque hug.

"God, that's disgusting," Jack murmurs with a gleeful gaze.

"You're Corpse now, huh?" He asks, looking into Corpse's dark eyes. "You survived."

"So did you," Corpse chokes out and then he's shifting the ribs aside to wrap his arms around Ethan's body.

Mark huffs. "Why do you suddenly have self-control?" He pauses and narrows his eyes as Ethan makes no move to suggest he heard him. "Please tell me you didn't eat Chica before we left."

Phil looks to Techno, who's clearly baffled but there's a smile tugging at his lips. At his other side, Wilbur is flicking his eyes between the embrace and Tommy.

Phil hopes they're able to sort things out.

Tommy watches them for a moment longer before turning to Phil. He holds out his hands and waves them in Phil's direction.

"I'm glowing." He states.

Phil blinks, steps forward and whilst Tommy doesn't step back, the three men that stepped through the portal with Tommy take a step in his direction, standing directly behind Tommy. They're all giving Phil an intense stare, almost daring him to try anything.

Tommy must realise that Phil is staring right back at them because he sighs. "Boys, meet my brothers. Piss baby is Dream--"

"Tommy," the man with the scar groans.

"-George is the pretty one--"

"Thank you," the man with the goggles says with a loud sigh.

"-and Sapnap." Tommy finishes.

The man flicking a lighter pauses. "No cool name?"

"I think everyone here has already heard about you," Tommy says and then stresses, "Nick."

Sapnap nods, face falling carefully blank. "Oh, yeah."

“Your brothers?” Wilbur asks, pulling the phone away from his ear. He looks them over, up and down, eyes narrowing and Tommy rolls his eyes.

“We’re not getting into a debate of who’s cooler, we all know it’s big man Philza.”

Phil snorts and then drops his gaze to Tommy’s hands as Wilbur says, “they have a plane for us, if you want to make your way over. Puffy’s handling the legal shit back in America.”

“Cost?” Phil asks, studying the way Tommy’s veins do glow an almost gold.

“We have to pull the border crossing in Detroit away until the election rolls around.”

Phil sighs as Tommy and his brothers watch curiously. He has no doubt that while they may not understand fully, they will have an idea of what he’s talking about. Crime is easy to understand when it’s somebody’s first language.

“Then let’s get out of here before I have to speak to the government,” Phil says and Wilbur briefly lingers, staring at Tommy, who doesn’t make eye contact before walking towards Toast.

“They won’t try anything,” Dream says to Phil. When Phil looks at him, Dream shrugs. “They don’t like to admit we exist. And they won’t try anything if we’re all here.”

“Or it’ll be like Shangdong all over again,” George mutters, looking up at the sky. “That went terribly.”

Sapnap tilts his head. “Was that the-“

They both nod, with identical terrifying grins.

“You’re all weird,” Tubbo comments and then looks to Ranboo. “Does this mean we could’ve totally taken over the American government with your spy skills and my hacking skills but you just chose not to?”

“I can’t remember,” Ranboo breathes.

Tubbo huffs, crossing his arms and turns to Tommy. “Will you help me take over the American government? Your brothers can help- hi! I’m Tubbo, this is Ranboo. That’s Techno and this is Phil. Wilbur’s the one that walked off sulking.”

The three of them all look mildly amused as Tommy grins, looking ten times more relaxed with Tubbo not mentioning anything that’s happened. “I’m not helping you take over the American government,” Tommy says with heavy sarcasm. “We’ll discuss this later.”

“Good,” Tubbo smiles back. “I also want you to know that we’re still friends and nothing in your past, present or future will ever change that.”

“Tubbo-“ Tommy says, panic in his eyes, feathers fluffing up, clearly eyeing the thin, pink line left over from the knife cutting into Tubbo’s neck.

“No.” Tubbo interrupts, voice strong. “You don’t have to tell any of us, anything-“

“A therapist might be good,” Techno interrupts and Tubbo nods.

“Therapy is practically a definite,” Tubbo adds and then stares Tommy down. “You matter to me, Tommy or Theseus or whatever the fuck your name is. I don’t care what you did. You’re my best friend and I trust you. I’m here for you.”

Tommy blinks at him and Phil catches the twitch to his wings, the way his red feathers curl tighter around him.

Phil knows what it’s like to be in a world of crime, seeing no way out. He grew his empire to find order in the chaos and this boy - along with the adults and children behind him - have been forced into it.

Phil made his choice a long time ago to be who he is today. Heroes have too many rules, too many legal traps in which to walk.

He saw the way the government treated Techno, saw the way Wilbur ran at the first sign of trouble. Then there was Tubbo, kicked to the curb and shunned. Ranboo and no one willing to try and find out the boy’s past.

Phil is a Villain because the world isn’t black and white. There is no such thing as good and evil. People are complex creatures, made up of both halves and sometimes, tough choices have to be made. Sometimes bad things have to happen to help the good.

He works in the grey. His morals are not so clear cut and he would never judge someone for doing things to survive.

Plus, he’s fought governments before for his boys. He doesn’t mind doing it again.

“Getting to make our own choices,” Dream breathes, all of Tommy’s brothers oddly still. “That’s going to be strange.”

“We’ll work it out,” Sapnap replies and then reaches over to ruffle Tommy’s hair. Even as he does it, he watches Phil and his boys with a sharp look, as if prepared to defend the action. “Tommy here did.”

“Because I’m a big man, snipsnap,” Tommy replies with an eye roll, batting his hand away.

“We’ll survive,” George says and the way they all twitch in his direction makes Phil think he’s the oldest, the one they trust with the big decisions. “We always do.”

There’s a look shared between them, one that’s odd and deep and meaningful. It’s a look that can only be earned through blood and shared experiences and Phil wants nothing more than to wind back time and stop these children living through this hell.

He doesn’t know what it was like but he can understand enough.

He'll wait, for if they ever want to explain it, and will do whatever it takes to make sure it never happens again.

That's a promise he intends to keep.

"Tommy," he says, quietly, smiles at the boy who watches him with tense wings. "You wanted to talk about you glowing? We can discuss on the plane if you want to come back to American, that is."

Tommy looks up at Dream and the man turns to George and Sapnap. For a moment, they look between themselves and George shrugs.

He says something in a language - Arabic, maybe? - that Phil blinks at but the others relax.

"Is Corpse and-?" Tommy waves over only to find Corpse talking with Mark, Ethan still holding him, Rae hovering at his shoulder. "I guess so."

"To America?" George asks and the English accent has dropped to American, one that's like Dream's.

"Good ol' America: land of the free and home to the brave," Tommy replies in an accent that's similar to Sapnap's.

"That's so cool!" Tubbo shouts. "Teach me, teach me, teach me--"

"Okay, okay!" Tommy laughs and the tension eases from Phil's wings as Tommy's own wings relax.

Phil turns and he knows that showing his back to dangerous individuals is a stupid move but he needs them to know that he trusts them enough to not instantly stab him in the back. They don't.

He spots Wilbur as he speaks to Toast, watching the children line up in rows, waiting as a plane begins to roll out.

"This is going to be fun," Ranboo breathes and Phil smiles.

It starts in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

A lone security guard takes a photo of a dead body, covered in bullet holes. Opening up his email on his phone, he adds every single media outlet he can. He then attaches the photo with the subject line as Red Room Organiser.

He does not pause. He simply presses send.

The minute he does, he blinks from where he's standing. He doesn't remember why he's here, why he has his phone out. He doesn't remember the man with the hood up and the scars across his face.

He simply blinks at the dead body in front of him and dials one hundred and two: the police.

In five hours time, it will be blasted across every news channel and the horror of the Red Room will be exposed. One photo at a time.

Chapter End Notes

They boys are back together without all the pain!!

Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

We're backkkkk!!

TW// mental health discussions, death mention, mention of child death, gore, brief mention of self harm, dissociation mention, human experimentation and human trafficking brief mention, blood and injury, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The plane is probably the largest Tommy's ever seen: a Boeing. He goes to sit with the rest of the agents but Wilbur nudges him, almost too hesitantly, gesturing to the stairs that lead to the second floor.

He's not surprised when Dream follows, Sapnap and George on his heels.

It seems being free, being alive means having overprotective brothers.

Not that he really minds.

Tommy can take care of himself: he's a Huntsman, he was trained to be independent. But there is something soothing, calming about being watched over, cared for.

Tommy simply raises his eyebrows and remembers what George told them, "we might as well go. We'll always have each other."

So he sits next to Wilbur while the other three sit behind him, clearly listening and clicks his belt on. He has to lean forward to make sure his wings are comfortable as they shift around him.

Something in his brain panics at having his wings pinned behind him but he knows he's safe with his brothers. He also has no reason to put them away, especially not when his body aches the way it does.

It's still strange for him to have them out. In the Room, he was only allowed them out at certain points. Now he's free to do what he pleases with them.

It's not really hit him that he's Life.

Frankly, thinking about it is slightly unnerving. He doesn't want to consider what that means for him, maturing to be a God.

But he has to tell Phil because he is married to a God. He should know something at the very least.

It's also not hit him that he's free.

"You're glowing," Phil says, sitting beside him.

"I am," Tommy replies, turning his head. "What do you know about Creation? Or I suppose you call her Life, don't you, old man?"

"Old man?" Phil asks, grinning at Tubbo and Wilbur immediately start laughing.

"You're so fucking old," Tommy replies, smirk to his lips. "With your wife and- and your wife. That's all. Tell me about Life."

Phil leans back while the others laugh, clasps his hands together and focuses all of his attention on Tommy. By the intrigued but hesitant look, he hasn't realised what Tommy means yet. Thankfully.

Wilbur hums and Tommy very carefully doesn't look to him. After all, Wilbur is the smartest one here. He'll cotton on quicker.

"Clara and Kristin made the world," Phil says. "Kristin met me, married me and made me immortal - her Angel - and Clara was pissed. She created abilities in people and then seems to have--"

He pauses and Tommy snorts. "You're not going to offend me by mentioning the Red Room, Phil."

"I should've never pushed you like I did when we met on the roof," he says after a pause and Tommy rolls his eyes.

"If I wanted you dead--" Tommy freezes, darts his eyes over to Wilbur.

They're matching now: same white strip of hair at the front of their head. They've both died and they've both come back.

That's because of Tommy.

Wilbur sighs. "Toms, I've already told you that I'm not upset."

"I fucking killed you," Tommy hisses, completely forgetting about the fact he needs to discuss his Life problems. "I was in your limbo!"

"And I'm alive," Wilbur shrugs his comments off. "You took a bullet for me. I'd say we're even."

Tommy frowns at him. He doesn't know how to counter it, doesn't know how to explain that Tommy is the problem here, the monster, the cold-blooded killer.

Not when these people seem to not care about his actions.

“But-“

“Tommy,” Wilbur says, delicately, “the way I reacted when I found out you were Theseus is inexcusable. You were clearly panicking and a child-“

“I’m not a fucking child!” Tommy snaps and hears Sapnap mutter in Greek, “you’re literally sixteen, kid, you’re practically a baby.”

“I will skin you,” Tommy snaps to Sapnap in Greek, looking over his chair to glare at him before turning to where Wilbur is staring at him.

“Everything okay?” Wilbur asks, running a hand through his hair.

Dream mutters something under his breath and George replies in Polish, “oh, are jealous because he’s taller than you?”

“Are you worried because you may be losing your pretty privilege?” Dream hits back in French and George goes to slap the back of his head, Sapnap hastily trying to stop them fighting.

Tommy just smiles. “They think you’re hot, very kissable.”

Wilbur’s face immediately flames as the others try and speak over each other to say Tommy’s lying.

“What?” Wilbur squeaks and Phil laughs so hard, Techno has to hit his back to make him breathe.

“Shut up,” Tommy says with a glare to his brothers and turns back to Wilbur’s wide eyes. “You didn’t do anything wrong. I’m the- I’m the bad one. I should be apologising to you-“

“Tommy,” Wilbur snaps and Tommy straightens. “You saved my fucking life. You took a bullet for me. You shot me because you were ordered too. Plus, what with Kristin being my adoptive mother, death doesn’t really stick for me, even if what you said in limbo is true. Stop trying to make yourself out as some sort of monster. You’re a kid trying to survive: don’t ever apologise for that.”

Tommy blinks at him, can feel the hush that’s settled over their chairs. He can feel multiple sets of eyes burning into him and swallows, hating the attention.

“Tubbo, Ranboo,” Tommy whispers and Wilbur tilts his head. “Remember that little girl on Buzzfeed Unsolved, Sveta?”

“Yeah?” Tubbo asks and Tommy can see the realisation hit Ranboo. The shock and sudden understanding, the flash of horror.

“That was me,” Tommy says, finding his voice. “I killed her.”

“Tommy-“ Ranboo tries but Tommy keeps looking at Wilbur, begging him to understand.

“She was nine and I killed her,” Tommy says, resisting the urge to shake as Wilbur keeps his face carefully blank. Behind them, his brothers are as still as him, watching Wilbur for his reaction. “At her birthday party. I cut her finger off and watched as her house went up in flames.”

“Tommy,” Sapnap breathes and Tommy remembers it like it was yesterday. Sometimes he hates that the Room let him remember.

“I don’t have to try and be a monster,” Tommy hisses, desperate for Wilbur to see him, to stop trying to make it out like Tommy is some kind of saint. “I am one.”

“Tommy-“ Wilbur tries but it’s Tubbo that’s glaring at him.

“Shut the fuck up,” Tubbo snaps and everyone turns to him. “We’re not trying to say it wasn’t fucked. We’re not trying to minimise what you went through, all of you, but that doesn’t make you a monster. Monsters don’t feel, Tommy. You did what you had to do to live and we may never know what that was like and you’re under no- no obligation to tell us but if you’re that hell-bent to make yourself the villain then what if it was me?”

Tommy blinks, thrown. “What?”

“What if they had a gun to Ranboo’s head and I had to kill you? Would that make me a monster if I pulled the trigger?” Tubbo leans closer, eyes burning. “Would I be a villain for just trying to survive?”

And Tommy-

Tommy can’t answer that.

Because if Tubbo had a gun to his head (or Ranboo did) and was told to shoot Tommy to survive, Tommy wouldn’t judge him. Just like with Dream accepting Tommy shooting him, just like Tommy accepting dying in his brothers’ arms.

“You’ve got to stop being so hard on yourself, kid,” Techno says, leaning back in his chair as the aeroplane rocks.

The pilot begins to discuss safety procedures and the time in which they’ll arrive in America. Tommy let’s the information wash over him, taking none of it in.

He thinks over what Tubbo said, what Wilbur said.

Tommy doesn’t think he’ll ever see himself as a good person. He may have had his life on the line but he still killed without mercy, without remorse. He doesn’t mourn their deaths, they’re but faces and names that haunt his dreams.

He swallows, looks up to Phil as the plane begins to roll forward. He doesn’t want to think about this, let alone talk about it. His hackles are rising and he’s so uncomfortable. But he has things to learn. He might as well be blunt about it.

“I take the abilities of the people I kill,” he speaks, words tumbling from his lips, “and I killed Life.”

Phil tilts his head at him, clearly working it out and it isn't until they're in the air - both of their wings fluttering at being in the sky - that realisation floods his blue eyes. Wilbur makes a low sound and Tommy can practically hear the way his brothers quieten down.

“Oh,” Phil says and Tommy snorts.

“Yeah. Oh.”

Theseus has missions where he is nothing by an observing party.

He's in a club in Ayia Napa when Theseus' finds out why George is so feared. He has barely seen the man - he's an agent that keeps to himself, only sticks by Dream and Sapnap - but he knows he holds a reputation for being clinical and calculating.

If the Room want a job done, quickly and efficiently, they send George.

The room is dark, the music loud and as Theseus sits up in the catwalk, he observes as George moves like a cat on the prowl. He dodges through the crowd, unbothered and calm, and Theseus watches as he approaches his mark.

In the corner, a group of men and women sit. They're running some type of illegal gang - Theseus has only been told the basics - and George doesn't waste time.

He simply pulls out his gun and starts to shoot. With the silencer on, and the loud music, nothing is heard and the lights flashing red hide the blood.

George headshots four before they start to move. He drops under an arm, shoots a stomach, flips and snaps a man's neck. A punch snaps his head to the side but he doesn't even flinch as he continues picking them off like flies.

At one point, he ejects the empty clip, swipes the legs out from under one, inserts a new clip and shoots the man in the head.

Within a couple of minutes, they're all dead and he turns away in an almost bored fashion and Theseus takes that as his cue to slip down and wait at the doors.

A bruise is blossoming on George's cheek and he has a split lip but there's no pain on his face, just satisfaction.

Theseus learns a very important lesson that day: never underestimate anyone.

“You're Life and you didn't think to mention it?” George hisses and Tommy rolls his eyes.

“I’m fine. I would tell you if it was hurting me or some shit like that.”

“Tommy,” Dream breathes, in Russian. “We just want to make sure you’re okay.”

Tommy once again rolls his eyes but his chest eases knowing that they’re upset over him not telling them, not about him being Life. For a moment, Phil simply stares at Tommy a moment longer before saying, “and Kristin-“

“I didn’t really give her time to explain,” Tommy says with a shrug, fingers curling into his feathers, looking down.

“Ah,” Phil says with a frown. “She is- very busy.”

“I think she’s taking care of Life’s responsibilities,” he says, fingers digging in until Wilbur gently slaps his hand to make him stop. Tommy sends him a quick glare and Wilbur rolls his eyes.

“I don’t know how many responsibilities Life has,” Phil says, leaning back in his seat, wings fluttering as if to draw Tommy closer. “Life is only active when things need to be created but the world is in a constant flux of life. It’s why Kristin has so many reapers: collecting every soul would be impossible but even with all of the reapers, there’s still a backlog.”

“I’ve only seen her twice,” Tubbo says, looking at the menus and safety card. “She’s nice.”

“She is,” Phil replies with a fond smile. “It’s just a shame she can’t stay longer.”

“How long does she normally stay for?” Tommy asks, running his fingers back through his primaries.

“One day for every ten years.” He says and his smile has turned sad. “For every century she gets a year.”

“Phil gets to meet her more because he’s a reaper,” Techno adds. “Taking souls.”

Wilbur leans forward to roll give Techno a meaningful glance. “I mean, technically, we’re all reapers. We’re just... less so.”

Tommy blinks and thinks that over.

He’s Life and Phil and his sons are part of Death.

“Do you feel any different?” Phil asks and then briefly drags his fingers over Tommy’s hand. He stills at the contact and Phil pulls his hand away. “Apart from the glowing.”

“No, I don’t feel different,” Tommy says with a shrug. “But normally when I take a power, it helps if I know what it is to use it.”

He knows there are powers he’s possibly absorbed and has been made to forget. After all, he’s learnt from experience that if he doesn’t use them, he loses them.

There's a reason he's ignoring the subtle buzzing in his mind, trying to alert him of emotions.

He doesn't want Schlatt's power.

"It might be because of the-" Sappap pauses and looks to the others. Tommy rolls his eyes.

"You can say graduation ceremony," he replies and then hums. "Kristin did mention the woman had been diluting herself."

The woman already gave them a part of her power and that's the reason - according to Kristin - that he was able to survive in the first place. Tommy, along with the other agents, is faster and stronger and more agile. He's suppose to be more intelligent, more focused, able to survive harsher conditions for longer.

He doesn't feel different, just confused.

"I-" Phil twitches, looks to Wilbur and then back at Tommy. He finds himself tensing, preparing. "Well, speaking on this topic, I'm going to say this as many times as you and the others need to hear it: you don't need to tell us anything if you don't want to."

Tommy blinks, he can hear Dream make a questioning noise behind him. "What?" He chokes out.

Phil swallows, wings curling in. "Your past and your powers are yours. We're getting you a therapist - that's non-negotiable because you need to have someone to talk to - but you don't have to say anything about your powers or past if you don't want to."

Tommy continues to blink. Techno leans around Phil's wings to say, "you also don't have to work for us, for Quackity or for the Heroes. If you want to have a bakery like Niki then you can. We'll sort out housing for you and a normal job if you want."

"You can also work for us, for Quackity or for the Heroes if you want," Wilbur adds, smiling at Tommy like he's not flipping his world upside down for the hundredth time. "That goes for all of you-"

"Apart from the kids," Phil interrupts. "They're not joining until they're at least twenty-one."

"But you've already graduated and you're used to L'Manberg's streets so we're not going to force you to sit out if you don't want to," Wilbur finishes. He looks over the chair to grin at Tommy's brothers. "Same goes for you three, same goes for the other older ones."

They're all silent for a long moment, clearly evaluating.

There's always a price though.

Tommy remembers the way they were loaned off to other organisations, other people as glorified bodyguards, as mercenaries, as bragging rights. He remembers the way they would return, bruises and grimaces, a new darkness or dissociation to their eyes.

“What’s the catch?” George is the one to speak, voice light. His eyes tell a different story though. “We’re the best there is and you’re - what? - letting us walk away?”

“If that’s what you want, mate,” Phil says, calmly with a shrug. “I’m a Villain but I’m not an asshole. It doesn’t seem like you’ve been given many choices before and I’m not one to force people to do shit they don’t want to.”

“We’re- we’re Huntsman Spiders, though?” Dream breathes, confused as Sapnap grips his seat with white knuckles.

“You don’t owe me anything, owe anyone anything.” Phil says, firmly. “So long as you don’t start shit with my family, I have no reason to involve myself. You’re free to make you’re own choices.”

Tommy sits there, dumbfounded as the plane flies. He’s confused and startled and Phil’s wings look so warm and soft to touch that he physically has to stop his fingers trying to reach them.

Tommy is a Huntsman Spider before he’s a person.

Twenty-eight to one. Well, considering Ranboo, twenty-eight to two.

Yet Phil seems to not be bothered if Tommy and his brothers leave.

Is he that naive or that stupid to waste an opportunity like that? It’s not like they’d say no. Tommy could hardly cope for the first months without someone telling him what to do.

“Is it a trap?” Sapnap asks lowly in Greek and Tommy tilts his head to look at him through the gap in his chair. The others twitch but he can tell by the way Techno is sounding out the words that none of them are familiar with the language.

“I-“ Tommy pauses. “I don’t know. I don’t think so. They let me run every time I wanted to.”

“I don’t trust it,” George says and then shrugs. “But I don’t think I can do normal.”

Dream snorts. “None of us can do normal.”

“I’d like to at least know what’s going on,” Tommy says, quietly. “I don’t- I don’t trust them but I’d like to.”

George’s face does something complicated but Dream’s softens and Sapnap smiles. “Okay,” Sapnap says, back in English.

“Yeah?” Tommy breathes and Sapnap reaches forward to ruffle Tommy’s hair.

“Yeah.” Sapnap shifts to look at Phil. “If Q and Karl are willing to have me, I’m working for them. They need the protection. Karl trusts anyone who smiles at him.”

Wilbur laughs and Phil nods. “Okay, mate.”

“Just to say,” Techno says. “You don’t have to make any decision now and it doesn’t have to be permanent. We’re all going to be in your corners if anyone tries anything.”

George still eyes them warily. “You don’t want us for the status symbol?”

Phil scoffs. “Mate, no offence, but you’re not some trophy. You’re a fucking person, not a show pony.”

“Show pony?” Dream tilts his head.

“Someone to show off, someone at the centre of attention,” Wilbur explains at their collective confusion and they all nod.

At the brief glance, Tommy explains, “we may know a lot of languages but slang sucks.”

“Figure of speech - those are the worst,” Dream breathes.

Techno raises his eyebrows. “Like what?”

“When pigs can fly,” Tommy says and Dream finishes, in Russian, “when the crawfish whistles on the mountain.”

Sapnap translates it and Tubbo looks away from where Ranboo and him are watching a film, half-heartedly. “That’s the Russian version of when pigs can fly? That’s so weird. Do you have others?”

George sighs and says in Turkish, “when fish climb poplar trees.”

Sapnap once again translates and Tubbo grins. “That’s so fucking weird.”

”Tommy,” Phil says, quietly. “I don’t know what it means for you to have absorbed Life’s powers. I’m sorry but I- I think that just makes you a God. As for working out what that means? I think that’s something you have to work out yourself, mate.”

“Fucks sake.” Tommy replies but shrugs. “It’s fine. I’ll work something out.”

Even if he’s slightly scared about what that means for him.

“We’re here,” Dream says in Russian and when Tommy turns to look at him, his green eyes are so protective and warm. “Even if you should have fucking told us-“

“Fuck off, piss-baby,” Tommy snaps but he’s grinning as Sapnap ruffles his hair.

“Seriously, Tommy,” George says, in that serious tone that means he’s trying not to express his emotions. “We’re not leaving you behind and we’re fighting for you. We’ll work this out together.”

“Aw, Gogs,” Tommy replies, sarcastically but he is relaxing. He trusts his brothers and he will be living with what he’s done for the rest of his existence.

And if he really is Life, he guesses that existence will be a long one.

It's a strange new world they're approaching, one of uncertainty and possible traps but Tommy is hopeful.

He has his brothers at his back and a family surrounding him.

Like this, with them, he feels like he could conquer the world.

In Tula, in a renovated weapons factory, deep beneath the surface, a man stands staring at the TV before him, listening to the news that plays. On the screen is a picture of an old friend, covered in bullets before the Peter and Paul Fortress.

"Isn't that Eret?" Chandler asks, frowning at the screen and the man finds himself nodding.

"Yes," he replies, fists clenching at his sides. "Yes, it is."

"Red Room Organiser found dead'," Chandler reads from the headline. "This is going to be bad."

"They won't look into the Department," he says but his voice isn't strong because he isn't confident. Not at all.

This is more than just a rumour. This is body and a fact on international news. Hell, even the Americans are discussing it, theories being thrown around with more weight than they realise.

Footsteps sound behind them and they both turn to find Chris approaching with a grin. "The challenge is going good- why are you both glaring? What's happening? Did Weapon S try and escape again?"

"Eret's dead," Chandler says, gesturing to the screen. "Have you heard anything from the Room?"

Chris blinks at the screen. "No. Have you?"

"Radio silence," the man says, running a shaky hand through his hair. "If Eret is dead, then that leaves Clara."

"Clara's been silent since that kid blew up the old facility," Chris says, slowly, his main focus being on the screen. He finally meets his eyes. "What if they got out? Some of them know about here."

"Weapon X," Chandler whispers, hand instinctively raising to his ribs, where the Weapon cut him after he went rogue.

"I doubt they're out," the man says, shaking his head. "Chris, you said the challenge is going well? Have their numbers halved?"

“Yes, boss.”

“Then get back to that. Take them to a new game, halve them once again until there’s the last three. Use them for the upcoming experiments.”

Chris’ gaze turns dark. “Any game?”

The man rolls his eyes. “Any game.” He turns to Chandler. “Try and find out where the woman is. If she doesn’t respond, take a team out to the Room. Find out what’s happening. If this situation gets worse, we’re going to be under fire. I’ll have to start talking to some government officials.”

“Yes, boss.”

Chris walks out but Chandler lingers, turning to watch the screen. His shoulders are tense, eyes far away and the man waits for him to say something.

“Jimmy,” he starts. “What if they- if they got out and they’re hunting down their Handlers, we’re next.”

“I know,” he replies, swallowing. He has a plan forming, a brief and basic one but it’s the only one that works. “Chandler... if they’re not there, go to Belarus.”

Chandler freezes. “Are you sure?”

“If they’re out, he’ll be able to lure them back,” Mr Beast responds with a grin. “After all, they’re little spiders, aren’t they? There’s a web waiting for them there.”

Chapter End Notes

They’re starting to talk with more foreshadowing ;)

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

Got some good interactions coming up ;)

TW// past brainwashing, past child abuse, mention of death, brief arachnophobia warning, mental health discussions, injury and blood mention, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The rest of the flight goes quietly. Tommy ends up leaving his seat half-way through, after Sapnap and George have slept for a couple of hours to take Sapnap's place. He curls under Dream's chin, wings fluttering out to George's soft fingers and sleeps for a couple of hours.

Sapnap watches over Dream as he sleeps while Tommy and George check on the other agents.

No one mentions their strange sleeping pattern. Tommy's thankful.

It's slightly awkward to admit that he can only sleep when he's either watched over by someone he trusts or if he's alone. And here, surrounded by possible threats, he's only comfortable when curled into his brother, knowing he's being protected when he's most vulnerable.

Below, the recruits are still and silent, probably thinking this is some type of test. Rae and Sykunno seem to be doing an amazing job at checking on them, handing out food and water as the flight attendants hover, unsure and confused.

Niki smiles at Tommy when he approaches, opening her arms and he falls into them.

"Hi," he mutters into her hair - their height different comical - and she laughs.

"Hey," she replies, into his shoulder. "Are you okay?"

He shrugs, pulling away. "I- I will be."

"Good." She says and then turns to the man beside her. "This is Jack. Former MI5. I was sent to kill him and then he was sent to kill me. We both made a different call."

George hums from behind Tommy as he says, "cool. I'm Tommy. This is George."

“Nice to meet you,” Jack says, polite but Tommy doesn’t let his guard down. Jack is friends with a Black Widow, one that was sent to kill him. That means something.

Niki must see his - and probably George’s - look because she says in Arabic, “he’s good. He doesn’t have an ability before you ask. I- I trust him.”

Those are some strong words and his eyebrows raise but he nods. If Niki trusts him, Tommy’s not going to purposefully make an enemy out of Jack.

George looks at her with a head tilt. “I think I remember you but it’s all fuzzy. I suppose they really did take our memories of defectors.”

She snorts. “Couldn’t have us following in each other’s steps, could they?”

George smiles. “I suppose not.”

It’s a fragile greeting. George doesn’t trust anyone out of his inner circle, but just like Tommy is accepting Jack, George has no reason to distrust Niki. Not when Tommy has faith in her.

“It’s strange,” she says, shifting to look at them. “They don’t- I know them but they don’t remember me.”

Tommy looks at George and sees a dull rage, one that reminds him of when Sapnap wants to lash out but is containing it. Barely.

How many have they lost? How many got out?

“If they had the chair,” George says, voice quiet, looking at Tommy with dark eyes. “We would’ve forgotten about you.”

Oh. Tommy blinks.

He’s misread George’s anger and something warm burns through him. George cares about Tommy, even if he lacks the ability to express it.

But he’s also not wrong.

Tommy might have stumbled upon them in Budapest while they were triggered. That fight would’ve been less as a greeting and more as a battle to save his life.

Tommy swallows, looks back at Niki. She has a lightness in her gaze and Tommy knows what she’s seeing. “Your brother?” She asks and he grins.

“Yeah. Gogy’s the big brother.”

George rolls his eyes, cross his arms over his chest. “Sometimes I regret all of my life choices.”

Tommy laughs, hitting him with his wing. “You love me really.”

“Sure,” George replies, lightly and fixes his intense gaze on Niki. “How are the others?”

“Good,” she replies, leaning back in her seat, stealing some peanuts from Jack’s bag. “The recruits think they’re being tested but some of the younger ones are speaking, which is an improvement. Ethan’s been a big help.”

George raises his eyebrows. “Ethan?”

“He fought back and they respect that,” Niki reminds him. “And he’s really nice. Especially when backed by Corpse and Rae, the ones that used to wait outside of the dorms. They don’t trust this situation but they’re willing to listen and talk.”

George’s shoulders relax. “Phil said he’s going to look after them.”

Niki smiles. “He will. They’ll be in good hands. Techno and Wil, you know them? Phil literally threatened domestic terrorism over them because of their powers. The government wanted them and Phil refused to hand them over.”

Of course, George grins at the sound of domestic terrorism but he relaxes more. They both do. Tommy’s glad the recruits will be cared for.

God know what would happen if the world could have their hands on child assassins, trained and ready to go at a moment’s notice.

“Good.” George mutters then stretches his arms up. “It was nice to meet you again, Niki.”

She snorts. “It was nice to meet you again, too.”

“Bye Niki, Jack!” Tommy waves and follows as George nods at Jack and then walks up to where Dream is still fast asleep.

Tommy sits between Phil and Wilbur, awkward and silent. He doesn’t know if he can speak to them, his mind still a mix of confusing thoughts-

“Toms?” Wilbur asks, lightly and Tommy turns, fingers brushing through his wings. “Can you teach me some Russian? It’s okay if you don’t! I just- well, I’ve been picking some up and I understand if you-“

“Shut up,” Tommy says with a small grin, switches to Russian, his mother tongue, as easily as breathing. “How much do you know?”

Wilbur’s face scrunches up. “Some?” He squeaks and Tommy laughs.

If Wilbur is trying, then Tommy certainly can.

Theseus may not know all of the Widows and Spiders but he knows the stories of them. He knows what they look like in action.

He can appreciate the Spiders because he will be one. He will. He will survive this. He will not fall and he will not fail. He is not weak.

So watching George wash through a crowd like a crimson flood, leaving no survivors; seeing Sapnap burn and burn and burn, too-hot hands warm as their ruffle his hair after torching a house, a building, an entire street; studying Dream's techniques and intelligence, the way he can see any situation and just know how to beat it: it's thrilling. Theseus lives vicariously through them.

But the Widows are also something to be appreciated and feared.

The Spiders are trained to be soldiers. The Widows are trained to slip through the cracks of humanity and exploit the way they're underestimated.

Theseus has seen the way the Widows work. They're most like actual spiders, luring their prey into a carefully woven web and striking when the prey is stuck.

They know how to smile just right and laugh with just the right lift. No sharp fangs like the Spiders, no venom dripping from jaws. It's a spider pretending it's too small to cause harm, being allowed to exist in a home.

They also know how to strike just right, snapping necks with thighs and shooting with scary precision.

Theseus is not scared of anything. His fears are beaten out of him.

He does, quietly, have a healthy dose of fear when it comes to the older Spiders and Widows.

Dream steps off of the plane, keeping Tommy in his peripheral. It's not that he needs to worry, Tommy is as much as a Huntsman as the rest of them and he's more comfortable here but Dream will always see him as the youngest.

He used to be like it with Sapnap until the man saved him during a mission involving cliffs and climbing and ribs dripping blood over the rocks. After that, Dream didn't feel the need to be so protective over him.

Tommy, however, still has the youth in his face, in his laughter, in the fluffy down feathers. He doubts Tommy will ever escape being known as the baby of the group.

Still, the boy seems free here. He's cautious and sticks close to them, almost if ready to defend them at a moments notice, but Dream can read how comfortable he is with this family.

He's relaxed and calm, speaking in slow tones to help the man he shot - Wilbur - learn more Russian. Much like Sapnap, he lacks patience but he laughs when Wilbur gets it wrong. He doesn't raise his hand the way they were taught languages.

One wrong move or word and a slap to correct it.

Dream takes a deep breath, drawing his eyes away from Tommy to find Sapnap watching the recruits and George taking in his surroundings. They're all in a neutral position, always prepared to act quickly, efficiently.

Their training is so ingrained, it's almost a part of their very DNA.

It's a subtle shift in George's shoulders that has Dream looking around, spotting a group of individuals waiting by the airport. Dream recognises them as some of the Heroes they fought.

Trigger, the Demon, his sidekick simply known as Skeppy, Vulpes, and the Captain.

Dream's breath catches as he studies her.

His-

His mother.

At least that's what his messed up memories suggest. The woman they tried to erase. He still doesn't remember going to L'Manberg but he remembers finding his file, remembers seeing her picture and trying to run when he was but a recruit.

He remembers the chair and nothing more after that.

He lost that memory. Seeing her again brought it all back.

Dream's too busy looking at her - the curls of her hair, the red of her hat and coat, the shape of her brow and cautious smile on her cheeks - that he doesn't notice how Tommy's gone silent. He looks to him, sees the way Dream's own stillness has made all of them freeze uneasily.

After all, if a panther pauses and looks into the foliage, it's wise to do the same.

He makes himself relax, to keep walking with his shoulders down and they all are quick to follow. His eyes catch Corpse's from where Ethan is lingering close and the man rolls his eyes.

Dream flips him off and follows after Phil, who's not noticed their slight hitch. Or, if he has, he's decided not to mention it.

"Puffy," Phil greets and then gestures to the mini-army behind him. "Meet my new kids."

She laughs and Dream simply watches, tries to memorise it, clinging to the hope he won't forget her again.

If she'll even want him.

He's a monster. They all are. And while Tommy's substitute family may think he's not, the rest of them can't pretend they're children. He's a cold-blooded killer, one that's cruel and manipulative. He's the best for a reason.

Even if Tommy killing the woman means he's definitely succeeded him.

"There's a lot," she replies and her voice is warm, if a little hesitant and George leans to brush their shoulders together, Sapnap taking a step closer. He finds that he can breathe more easily. "I suppose crime does pay enough for so many hungry mouths."

Phil shrugs with a grin, wings open and relaxed. "What can I say? I'm a charitable guy."

The joking between them is familiar and a strange emotion curls at Dream's throat. Anger? Or is it jealousy, that he's missed twenty-two years of his life with his mother?

He swallows, leans back into Sapnap and George's space. They all were told they never had mothers or fathers, they never had families waiting for them.

They were spiders. They didn't need human connection.

Puffy - his mother, his breathing and real mother - looks past them after a second to study their faces before looking out at the sea of children, all in first position, all waiting.

"Did Wilbur-" Techno says and she nods, her face pinching.

"We'll hold a funeral but..." Puffy trails off as Trigger gives her shoulder a squeeze and Dream realises they're talking about Schlatt. The man Tommy shot. Dream's uncle. "He was a bad man but he was still my brother. Even if I couldn't recognise him in the end."

"I'm sorry for your loss," Phil says, his voice pitching in a way that has Puffy straightening.

"Thank you," she replies, solemn and then swallows. "I'll be heading out in a week. Did you inform-?"

Wilbur nods. "We called some people. His body is waiting in a Russian morgue for you to collect. We didn't want a dead body near all of the children."

Dream nearly laughs at that. All of these children have killed at least once. They're used to corpses.

Her expression smooths out. "We have buses waiting for them to be moved. My children have built a temporary orphanage until we can find suitable accommodations--"

Dream blinks, remembers Alyssa's words. He has a sister, doesn't he? And he has that fake memory of killing three people, a woman, a girl and a man. So he has a brother, too?

"Excuse me," George interrupts, English accent making him sound more polite. Puffy and Phil turn to him but he doesn't flinch under their attention. He never does. "Will they have the other agents with them?"

"Of course," Phil speaks for her. "If that's what you need, we won't separate you."

"Once there, we can discuss if things need to be changed," Puffy adds.

George turns to Phil, shoulders tense. “Do you remember those words Eret said to Niki? The ones said to Tommy?”

Phil frowns. “None of us speak Russian, mate.”

They all collectively breathe out from that as Niki informs Phil, “they’re trigger words and phrases.”

“Can you be deprogrammed?” Trigger asks Niki and she shrugs, looks to Rae, to Tommy.

“Maybe but I don’t think anyone trusts you enough to tell you the words.”

Phil smiles at her and then at George. “We can discuss it more later but you don’t have to tell us if you don’t want to, okay?”

George smiles and he looks nothing like a Huntsman, nothing like the trained killer he is. “Thank you.”

Puffy then shifts, as she asks, “can you all speak English?”

They all nod. “It’s compulsory,” Toast says. “Even the young recruits will understand.”

She both tenses and relaxes. Dream somewhat understands. Their lives are confusing to outsiders.

“Good,” she says and then George is calling up Toast and Rae, directing them as Trigger and the Demon move to call the buses over.

Dream filters out the information he doesn’t need as he watches Vulpes collapse into Wilbur’s arms. They hold one another and Dream just knows this is more than a friendship, even more than a brotherly bond.

This is father and son reuniting.

“You ever fucking do that to me again,” he hears Vulpes hiss, “I will use you as fertiliser.”

“I love you, too, Funds,” Wilbur replies. “I’m here. I’m alive. I’m okay. I’m sorry for scaring you.”

Dream looks away from the intimate display to see Tommy - thankfully not watching the interaction - beside Tubbo and Ranboo, watching the children be placed into groups, agents accompanying them. Dream doesn’t remember Ranboo as a recruit, not really.

All he remembers is seeing a boy with bi-coloured eyes and feeling protective over him. Only for him to not return from Siberia, Sapnap grinning because Tommy survived.

“Just go and speak to her,” Sapnap groans when Dream continues to watch his little brother laugh at something Tubbo says. “Go on.”

“Fuck off,” Dream hisses. “I can tell you’re glad your fiancé’s aren’t here. You’re worried what they’ll think-“

Sapnap punches his shoulder, a little too hard to be playful. “At least if they were here, I’d talk to them.”

Before Dream can counter, Tommy is calling, “you’re a massive pussy, Dream.”

He flips the boy off as George pauses his conversation with Trigger to give a shooing gesture to Dream towards Puffy. “Go,” he commands and Dream sighs.

He’s never been able to say no to George.

She looks away from Phil as he ducks his head and approaches. “Can I speak to you?” He asks, quietly and she looks hesitant, a little scared before nodding, sending a glance to Phil.

If Dream wanted, not even the Angel of Death would be quick enough to save her life.

But Dream already has one memory of killing her. He doesn’t want another one. He doesn’t want a real one.

“Hi,” she says, quietly when they’re far away from the group but in eyesight. “I’m Puffy. I remember- I remember you lurking around my house a few years back.”

Dream swallows and it feels like he’s forgotten all of his training. He knows how to speak to people, how to lure them into a false sense of security. Yet he’s fumbling and hesitating like an idiot.

“I’m Dream,” he says. “I- I don’t remember what happened when I came to L’Manberg, so I can’t really help you on that front.”

All he remembers is killing her and then wiping out multiple Spiders and Widows sent after him before George turned up.

“That’s okay,” she replies, smile on her face. “What did you want to talk to me about?”

He looks away and tries to order his thoughts. As much as he longs to be accepted, he doubts it will be that easy and he can’t walk away. She has a right to know that her son is alive.

Even if he’s a monster.

“When I was a recruit,” he starts, “I snuck into the file room. Your name and photo was in my file stating you-“ He takes a deep breath, looks back so she can see the honesty in his eyes. “It said you were my mother.”

She freezes, mouth gaping as she studies his face. He remains still under her scrutiny.

Her face flashes with multiple emotions: confusion, distrust, longing, pain. He does nothing but stand there and wait, for anger or rejection or screams that he’s a liar.

“I’ll do a blood test if you want,” he says when the silence starts to become too uncomfortable. “You just need to promise to destroy the sample afterwards.”

Because his blood, along with all of their blood, is important. It’s changed. They’re not truly human, they’re more and in the wrong hands, that’s dangerous.

“Dream,” she breathes, sounding out his name and his gaze instantly drops to hers. “You said your name is Dream?”

He nods. “That’s the one they gave me.”

He was Twenty in the beginning. Then he was Dream. Then he was Huntsman Spider.

“Can I-“ She stares at him, teary eyes flicking over every inch of his face. “Can I hug you?”

He doesn’t think as he opens his arms and she falls into his embrace. She’s tiny compared to him - he was the tallest in the Room and Wilbur only has a couple of inches on him - but she seems to fit in his hold. Her arms wrap around his ribs and he gently drapes his arms over her shoulders, careful to not move too much.

He can’t exactly explain that hugs are a rarity for him, for all of them. Hugs mean an easy way for a knife to end up in his ribs, a stab in the back. Any affection is a double-edged blade designed to cut.

She pulls back after a moment of sniffing, tears staining his shirt and whispers, “you don’t look old enough to be twenty-six.”

At that, he freezes. Twenty-six. Dream’s not- Dream thought he was-

He tries to count back the New Year’s Days he remembers, and only finds six in his memory. Making him twenty-two. Not twenty-six.

He knows when he graduated he was sixteen - it’s the prime age of it and graduation ceremonies are always held during their sixteenth birthday. But he can’t remember more than six New Years - the day of their collective birthdays, even though celebrating them were forbidden.

He looks over at Sapnap and George, at the other agents helping the recruits onto buses. George is older than him, he believes he’s twenty-four. Sapnap is younger. They thought he was twenty.

Yet-

“I’m twenty-six?” He asks and she blinks at him.

“August twelfth, nineteen ninety-five.” She says, confidently. “That’s when you were born. I can tell you the time if that makes a difference-“

Dream looks back over to George and finds their gazes locked. He’s panicking, he can tell by the way everything else blurs, sounds and smells and sights.

He's drifting, suspended.

If Dream is older than he thinks, than he looks, then what about the others? Jack is the oldest among them, how old is he really?

Tommy was sixteen for his graduation but it's been months since then. Is he already losing the days like they clearly have?

"Dream?" George asks and he blinks, George coming into focus before him. There's an underlying tension to his shoulders, his eyes. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he breathes. The look he gets makes him clear his throat, straighten up. "Yes, I'm fine."

"Did you not know your birthday?" She asks, quietly. "I'm sorry if this- I just never expected to ever have you in my arms again. I thought-

She chokes and Dream reaches for her instinctively, wanting to stop the hurt spilling across her features. She leans into his arms and they both know, even without blood tests, that they're blood related.

It's a feeling, nestled deep in the steady beat of his heart, in the marrow of his bones: family.

"I'll explain when we're not standing on a runway," he says, calmly, briefly meeting George's eyes.

George reads his expression and nods. They both have known each other since Dream was early in the program - clearly longer than they expected - and reading each other is second nature.

"Puffy," Dream says when she's no longer shaking. "This is George. My... my partner."

George rolls his eyes but neither can deny the title. Ignoring the connotations, they've worked together so many times that even the Room called them partners.

Puffy smiles at George, not even blinking at the term. "It's nice to meet you."

It's a start.

Dream just hopes it'll last.

In Washington D.C., in the Triskelion, Grian sighs. They're all facing the large screens in the centre of the room, watching the news play out about the Red Room Organiser being shot dead. Xisuma - their Team Leader - is oddly silent, simply watching the news with a calculating look to his eyes.

"Eight bullets?" Grian mutters, whistling. "That's overkill, isn't it?"

“That’s more than overkill,” Mumbo replies, leaning back in his chair. “That’s personal.”

“Have we heard of them before?” Stress asks, looking up at Xisuma from where she’s leaning over the table. Grian follows her gaze and Xisuma snaps out of his silent contemplation.

“Eret?” Xisuma says, finding his voice, meeting her eyes. There’s something shared there that Grian cannot decipher. “We’ve had... knowledge about a secret organisation breeding child soldiers but we’ve never explicitly heard their name before.”

She leans back, an odd look to her eyes. “This could end badly if someone’s picking off the leaders.”

Grian snorts as Xisuma holds his head in his hands. God, do they all know. If they’re not careful, an entire power balance could cause an all out war.

“Red Room,” Grian is saying, muttering under his breath as something twists in his memory. “Wait, wasn’t that- didn’t we speak to someone who mentioned an organisation called the Room?”

“Wasn’t there tapes?” Stress adds, tilting her head.

Mumbo looks up. “Those two siblings, right? And the man’s son? Those tapes were from years ago, though. At least a decade. We never found anything afterwards and that source disappeared.”

They all quieten, turning to face the screens as the newscaster explains two Russian politicians have been found dead in their apartments. Both suicides. They all know better.

“This is going to end very badly,” False mutters.

“Is that an opinion or fact?” Xisuma asks and she pauses. Her eyes go distant and her frown deepens.

“Everything’s murky. I need someone to base the future off.” She shakes her head, eyes blinking back to focus. “At least I know I’m living through this.”

Mumbo groans. “Good to know, False. Anything enlightening like the fate of the world?”

“Hey,” Xisuma says, quietening them. Grian draws his eyes away to his phone buzzing, skimming over the messages. “Mumbo, go and get Ren to hunt down those tapes. False, contact Gemini and Scar: see if they’ve heard anything. Grian-“

He knows his shoulders are shifting, wings wanting to come out as they sit under his skin. Xisuma is staring at him though, so he looks up from his phone and meets his eyes.

“Grian?” Xisuma asks, softer.

“Somethings up with the Syndicate,” Grian breathes. “The Angel was seen at an American embassy in Russia.”

He watches as Xisuma shares a look with False. Both turn back to him.

“The Syndicate are in Russia as this is happening?” Mumbo draws. “That’s too much of a coincidence.”

Xisuma clears his throat. They all look up. “Grian, try and find out what they’re up to.”

They all nod as Mumbo rises, stalking away from his chair and out of the door. False turns to her phone, quickly typing a message to their undercover agents.

Grian just watches Xisuma: the way he frowns at the screens, pulling at his scar, the way he seems more concerned than surprised. It makes Grian’s wings want to pop out and curl around him protectively.

He’s been noticing it, that a few of their Strike Team Heta (nicknamed the Hermits because their team keeps to themselves) have been shifty for the past few months. First it was Xisuma, showing up with dyed white hair. Then it was False and Scar and suddenly a steady group of them were more distant, their ranks had closed.

Grian had felt the shift but never mentioned it. So long as everyone is breathing, Grian doesn’t want to cause unnecessary trouble.

He trusts his friends.

“X,” Grian calls, drawing Xisuma’s attention to him, away from the screens. “Are you okay?”

False stills but Xisuma turns to smile at him. “Yeah, just stressed.”

Grian grins back even as he can hear the blatant lie in that statement.

Chapter End Notes

Dream and Puffy meeting!!

Also,,, the agents are older than they appear,,, hmmmmmmm...

Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

A bit longer for some explanations ;)

TW// past child death, past child abuse, past brainwashing, past violence, mention of trigger words, brief mention of dissociation, mental health discussions, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For a second, standing in the dormitories of the orphanage, Tommy has the urge to throw up. Sure, the outside is brick walls and large windows, all soft pastel colours painted on the inside. There's a field at the back and a courtyard at the front but this- this makes Tommy sick to the stomach.

Beds, in neat rows, lining the walls. The rooms are large but also incredibly small. Light colours on the walls, no particular design, no personality.

It reminds him of the Room.

But those fears are squashed when he hears a small recruit ask Corpse, from where they're all standing in the hallway, looking in, "where are the handcuffs?"

Everyone freezes. The boy shuffles, wincing as he keeps his eyes to the floor, clearly expecting a blow. Tommy swallows as Phil watches them curiously, especially when he can see the other agents also look curiously around.

"Phil," Tommy is the one to speak, keeping his voice, keeping his body language, lax and calm. His wings flutter with tension but he keeps a smile on his face. "How quickly can you bulk-buy handcuffs?"

Something burns in his eyes and Tommy can't help but see the Angel in his expression, in his rage. It's slightly terrifying but Tommy has faced Death herself and survived. He does not flinch, he does not twitch. He keeps the smile.

Tommy narrows his eyes back. He can't have the children panicking, seeing this as a test they can't beat.

It took him passing out from sheer exhaustion when he was first free from the Room before he could sleep without them.

Phil straightens, wings tightening around him. “Handcuffs,” he says and then nods. “I’ll make some calls. There should be soap in the shower rooms.”

Tommy smiles wider. “Thank you.”

At their causal conversation, at Tommy’s clear respect for Phil, the other recruits relax. They’re losing the panicked stares.

“See,” he grins at them. “Right. Grownup shit. Food and then shower?”

He looks to George, who nods. “Let’s find the canteen.”

The canteen is large enough for all of the recruits to sit down and eat - Quackity has some of Las Nevadas’ chefs here to cook - so long as the rest of the agents stand. Speaking of Quackity, he’s spotted him, and one hundred percent isn’t hiding from him. He’s with Karl but Tommy can’t see Sapnap anywhere.

It seems he’s also one hundred percent not hiding from them either.

“Can I ask a possible triggering question?” Techno drawls and Tommy looks up at the pink-haired man from where they’re leaning against the wall of the canteen.

“Yeah?”

“I know you all look the same age,” Techno says, looking at the agents clustered together. “But there doesn’t seem to be a lot of you. There’s at least one hundred children here and maybe twenty adults.”

“That’s not a question, Techno,” Tommy says but he understands enough.

Tubbo has drifted over from talking to Trigger, Ranboo at his side. The boy is trying to ignore the stares of the agents and by the hunched shoulders and downcast eyes, it isn’t working.

Wilbur is by his other side while Puffy and Phil talk amongst themselves, watching the children. Anger and sorrow flooding their eyes. Tommy looks away.

Wilbur is the one to ask, “why are there more children than adults?”

“Well,” Tommy says, wings tightening around him. “Ranboob was in my class and we lost him, along with a couple of others, during our Siberia trip.”

“Lost him?” Tubbo asks, antennae flicking back and forth.

Tommy can’t meet their eyes, even as his training begs him to. “After we- after we kill someone for the first time, after we get the tattoo, we’re sent on missions and training exercises-“

“But you’re five?” Techno hisses, crimson eyes burning as Tubbo flutters up to try and search Ranboo for the tattoo.

“Where?” He asks, oblivious to the tension in Wilbur and Techno’s shoulders. “Where is it?”

“Left ear.” Tommy replies, quietly, watching as Ranboo ducks to allow Tubbo to look. Tommy’s curious - and eager to prolong the inevitable conversation - but the gasp from Tubbo tells him everything.

“That means I-“ Ranboo pauses and Tommy turns his eyes back to the floor.

“It means you survived.” Tommy tries to say delicately but it comes out blunt. “Some fell at that first hurdle.”

“What?” Wilbur squeaks and Tommy shrugs.

“The point is,” he continues through gritted teeth. “We- the training is hard but the glory of-“

He cuts himself off and shudders. That was a phrase they used to use in the chair. Over and over.

He is one of twenty-eight young danseurs with the Bolshoi. Training is hard, but the glory of the soviet culture, and the warmth of his parents makes up for it.

Of course, that’s not right. It never was.

He is one of twenty-eight Huntsman Spider agents with the Red Room. Training is hard, but the glory of the soviet supremacy, and the warmth of his parents, all of his parents, makes up for it.

“Tommy?” Tubbo asks, quietly and Tommy shakes himself.

“Sorry, it’s just-“ He cuts himself off, clears his throat as his wings curl tighter. “Nothing. Uh. The training exercises are hard and the missions are tests. Everything is a test. So when you fail, you fail. There are no second chances in the Red Room.”

For a second, they stand there and then Techno whispers, as though the words are too horrifying to say louder than a murmur, “they kill you off?”

“Cull the herd so the fittest survive,” Tommy says, just as quietly. He finally looks up and meets Ranboo’s gaze. “I am the Huntsman Spider. Twenty-eight to one. Only that’s not true anymore, even if you didn’t pass, you still survived. Twenty-eight to two.”

“Wait,” Wilbur breathes and then looks out at the sea of recruits. “Twenty-eight to one? So the older ones are fewer because-“

He doesn’t finish his sentence. He doesn’t have to. They all know.

There are fewer older ones because the rest of their class is dead. Either on a mission or in an unmarked grave.

For a long moment they stand in silence.

Tommy doesn't speak, can't find himself to. He does not mourn the rest of his class, just like he doesn't mourn the marks he's killed.

He doesn't feel. He doesn't need to. He's not weak.

And yet the way they're reacting, their horrified expressions tell him that he should be more than apathetic.

"There are a lot less adults than I'd expect," Ranboo says, slowly and Tommy shrugs.

"Agents get moved around between organisations," he informs them. "We're bought and sold, used as whatever the buyer needs. Sometimes as bodyguards, sometimes... sometimes not."

"That's why you panicked when I mentioned a job," Techno says and Tommy snorts.

"Yeah, I thought- I mean you're a Villain, I didn't fancy being a pet."

"You say that like you know," Wilbur says, voice honeyed but Tommy just blinks, doesn't answer. His silence is telling enough.

He remembers the training for blending into the background, acting as furniture. He remembers learning how to not flinch, how to distance his body from his mind, how to drift into his forest.

Most of all, he remembers his brothers' reactions to when they would return from being loaned. It makes him shiver.

"As for the younger adults, that's Dream's fault." Tommy continues, ignoring Wilbur. "On a mission, he wouldn't return so they sent agents after him to bring him back and complete it. He- they would go and not return. He must've taken down at least ten before they sent George."

The details are fuzzy. Tommy doesn't remember much apart from hearing about Dream's tantrum.

Both Techno and Wilbur open their mouths but Phil is walking towards them, grimace on his face, stopping their comments before they can even start. "The handcuffs are arriving in ten minutes," he says and then looks to Tommy, eyes imploring. "Why?"

"It's how we slept back in the dorms." Tommy replies, lightly. "They'd lock us in after our showers and then unlock them at six in the morning. It was- I found it a hard habit to break when I was free."

"They handcuffed you?" Wilbur snarls as Techno's eyes burn and Tommy really needs to stop telling them all these secrets.

They're his childhood, his entire life.

But they still want him in their lives. He has to repay them somehow.

“They’re bringing those joke ones, you know, the ones that if tugged, just snap open.” Phil explains. “No lock or key. Handcuffing like that is a fire hazard and I don’t think my conscience would handle it if I handcuffed children to their beds.”

“It’s all we’ve known,” Tommy mutters and they all quieten at that.

“Well, hopefully that will be changing.” Phil replies, calmly but with a hint of fire.

Tommy smiles and prays that he’s right.

He’s not Theseus when he’s in Vancouver. He’s Nathan.

He’s not Theseus when he’s in London. He’s Riley.

He’s not Theseus when he’s in Cincinnati. He’s Eli.

He’s not Theseus in New Orleans. He’s Ben.

Sometimes the names are the same. Sometimes Dream joins as his big brother. Sometimes he gets to spend more than a day or two there.

Theseus has been to every continent on earth apart from Antarctica. He knows enough languages that he can pick most up if he listens long enough. He can change his accent as easy as breathing to fit the area.

There are so many covers in his mind, some begin to blur until Theseus no longer knows who he really is. He’s an amalgamation of all of them.

He dreams of being those boys, living their lives of school and homework and bruised knees from falling from his bike. But he’s always Theseus when he wakes.

Sometimes he wants to join his dreams permanently.

Quackity figures out pretty quickly that Sapnap is hiding from him, from them. Karl finds it funny; if the soft smile he wears is anything to go by.

“Give him time,” he murmurs, holding Quackity’s hand as Purpled and Punz stand behind him. Not that they’d be effective bodyguards against an orphanage filled with assassins. Child assassins.

“I just need to know the truth,” Quackity says as Charlie dances around a laughing Tommy, shouting at him in joy, congratulating him for not dying.

“And if he can’t tell us everything?” Karl hits back, eyes narrowing. “One of us has to be supportive in this relationship.”

“Karl,” Quackity breathes but the man isn’t looking at him anymore. There’s a pinched expression on his face, eyes big and soft, one hand gripping Quackity’s, the other gripping the end of his sweater.

“Just because he’s done bad things doesn’t make him a bad person.”

Quackity keeps his gaze focused on him until the sound of footsteps makes him look up. Charlie has his arm around Tommy’s shoulders, a grin to his lips as Tommy’s wings flutter.

When he first saw Tommy, he was surprised to see the same white strip of hair that Wilbur suddenly had. Not only that, Tommy’s veins were glowing a soft gold. Now, not so much. The glow is lesser but the white hair is still stark against his skin.

They’re beautiful. A deep crimson colour that shifts into that of flames when the light hits them.

“Quackity,” Tommy starts, looking bashful and so, so young, like the boy he met all those months ago asking for a job. “I’ve been informed that you don’t hate me.”

Quackity finds himself softening instantly. “Of course I don’t hate you. Even if business is a little touch and go-“

“Q,” Karl hisses, jabbing him with an elbow. Quackity is quick to dodge it, smacking his elbow away before he turns to Tommy, who’s smiling at their play-fighting.

“Tommy,” Quackity says, voice warm. “I don’t understand but I don’t hate you and I’m glad you’re alive.”

“Agreed,” Punz and Purpled add.

“Oh,” Tommy breathes, eyes a little wide. “Thank you.”

“We love you, Tommy,” Charlie says with a grin and then whispers, quietly, “you’re free.”

Tommy looks over at the children. “We all are.”

They both know it’s not going to be easy. Quackity still would like to sit down with Tommy and discuss everything that’s happened but he knows that the boy is dealing with a lot already.

Tommy turns back to Quackity and Karl and says, “Sapnap will be on the roof. If you want to speak to him, that is.”

“Really?” Karl stumbles out. “Thank you!”

“Karl,” Tommy stops him before Quackity can either make up his mind to follow or not. “Remember what I said. Faking love is impossible and he may have been spying on you but the alternative could very well be his or all of your deaths.”

Karl nods, drops Quackity's hand and takes off. For a second, Quackity watches and then sighs. "Fucking hell."

"Q," Tommy interrupts his breakdown. "He's not going to hurt either of you. He's scared you're going to reject him."

"He's an assassin," Quackity replies and Tommy rolls his eyes, throwing his arms wide.

"We all are but we survived. Right now, that's all that matters."

Quackity lets that settle in before saying to Punz and Purpled, "stay here."

He takes off after Karl, finding the stairs and climbing them. He doesn't exactly trust an elevator built in less than a day by Drista.

He comes across a door swinging shut that leads to the roof and Quackity doesn't hesitate to burst through it. He pants as he watches Karl tumble into a familiar figure.

Black hair and dark eyes. A bandana holding his fringe back from his face. He's wearing something Quackity's never seen on him before: combat gear, like Tommy's, like the children's.

Nick. Sapnap.

Even as strong arms curl around Karl protectively, those dark eyes still pin Quackity to where he's standing.

"Hi," he says, voice in that familiar Texan drawl. Quackity wants to melt into it, wants to fall into his arms like Karl has but he knows that Texan drawl is fake. This man isn't Nick, from Texas, arriving in Las Nevadas looking for a bit of fun. This is Sapnap, from Russia, an assassin.

"Sapnap, huh?" Quackity finds himself saying and the man squeezes Karl tighter, eyes bleeding out panic.

"Yeah," he says, voice strained. "That's what they called me."

"You're an assassin."

Sapnap winces. "Yeah. Well, not anymore now that I'm free. But yes, I was."

"And you came to Las Nevadas--"

"Q," Karl says, pulling away from warm arms to plead with his fiancé. "Not now."

Quackity ignores him, needing to hear Sapnap say it. "You came for information. You spied on us."

"I didn't have a choice," Sapnap hisses, letting Karl step away, closer to Quackity's side.

"You think any of us wanted to- wanted to be what they made us? To be the monster under

the bed, the asset they deployed when they needed a job doing?”

“You could’ve ran,” Quackity says, leaning forward, emotions swirling in his head in a confusing mix. He wants to hug the man, to sleep by his side again. He remembers the nights of pure warmth, of feeling so content in his bones. Now they’re all tainted by lies and the knowledge that he never knew the man he loved. This person before him is a fraud. “We would’ve helped you.”

“No one could’ve helped us,” Sapnap replies, running a hand through his dark locks. “Dream- Dream, my brother, he tried. He disappeared and was dragged back. Ludwig was shot. Felix was shot. Reeth was shot. Lily was shot. Jaiden was shot. Tommy got dragged back. You don’t just escape the Red Room. It’s not that easy.”

“Tommy tried-“ Quackity snaps but Sapnap’s eyes are burning.

He remembers, suddenly, that Sam mentioned Sapnap having fire powers. Grabbing the back of Karl’s sweater, he tugs him closer. Sapnap spots that move easily enough and his face drops.

“I’m not going to- I would never hurt you.”

It’s the honest truth. Quackity knows liars, he is one, and he’s spent enough time around Wilbur to hear a silver tongue at work. It still doesn’t ease the pounding of his heart.

“Not unless they told you to,” he says and regrets it the minute it’s out of his mouth as Sapnap’s face falls scarily blank.

“Quackity,” Karl hisses, as he watches Sapnap carefully. “That was uncalled for.”

But they all know it’s the truth.

Quackity may not have been there but he’s seen the white in Wilbur’s hair. He knows Tommy shot him under orders.

And as much as the rest of them seem to not mind - Quackity doesn’t have Death as an adoptive mother, if he gets shot in the head, he dies - Quackity never forgets important information. Las Nevadas is built on storing away secrets, waiting to use them to deliver the quickest blow.

Wilbur may be a silver tongue but Quackity has always been good at turning his words into poison.

“No,” Sapnap says after a while. “Q’s right. If they told me to, I wouldn’t have a choice.”

“Sapnap-“ Karl tries but he’s not looking at Karl, he’s looking straight at Quackity. His gaze is intense, like he’s staring down a sniper rifle, hovering it right over Quackity’s heart.

“What do you want me to say, Q?” Sapnap asks, desperation clinging to his tone. “What do you need to hear?”

“I don’t understand why you didn’t trust us enough to tell us,” Quackity replies, feeling so tired. “I had Phil on my side, Karl had the Captain. We could’ve- we could’ve worked something out but instead we think you’re dead-“

Sapnap laughs and it’s a low, rumbling sound, like the crackling of fire. It’s not the nice, warm sound Quackity’s heard before.

It makes something angry burn inside of him. Something like rage. “What?” He spits and can’t stop the words spilling out. “Was any of it real? Were we just targets to you? Did you even love us?”

Sapnap pauses at that. His eyes look like flames and he whispers, “what?”

“Q,” Karl warns but Quackity feels on fire.

“Can you even love?” He asks, voice dark and Sapnap reels back.

Karl blinks, a tiny noise escaping his lips as Quackity burns and burns and burns. Sapnap looks more than a little angry.

Sapnap looks like he’s being consumed by flames. His hands shake ever so slightly but Quackity knows what a burning man looks like.

He can’t take the words back.

And maybe that’s the problem. Quackity is used to fighting for everything: his home, his degree, his business. Yet meeting Karl and Sapnap was easy, too easy. He didn’t have to fight tooth and nail for them, they just fit together, balancing one another.

Now that dynamic has changed because Sapnap isn’t Nick.

Without that balancing act, Quackity is all poison and fear of rejection, fear that he’s let someone dangerous so close to the one thing Quackity can’t lose.

His heart.

“Tommy said you can’t fake love-“ Karl tries to say but Sapnap interrupts him.

“You know what? Fine.” Sapnap snaps and everything about him suddenly dulls, like he’s losing his personality before their eyes.

He straightens, chin up. His shoulders roll back but the fire still burns in his eyes. A steady, burning heat that reminds Quackity of those forest fires that blaze within a blink.

“Hi, I’m Sapnap. I killed someone when I was five and then had a tattoo marking me as property of an organisation called the Red Room. They beat me, and tortured me, and I don’t have many scars because I heal so quickly. At sixteen, I survived against all of my other classmates, twenty-eight in total including me, and was remade by Creation into a Huntsman Spider. I don’t know how many people I’ve killed, because they would wipe our memories if we did something they didn’t like. But I’m assuming it’s a lot. Happy?”

Quackity is silent. Karl blinks back tears as he mutters, “not really, no. I’m sorry that you had to- I know sorry won’t ever make it better or change it but I am sorry.”

Sapnap’s eyes soften. “Thanks.” He turns to Quackity, expecting. “Q?”

Quackity doesn’t know what to say.

That’s ironic: Quackity speechless.

He loved Nick but this isn’t Nick. This is a stranger wearing his face. This is someone who is dangerous and deadly and Karl falls too hard, too quickly and Quackity has to protect him and Las Nevadas.

But then he thinks of Tommy.

Of the boy that came to him with bags under his eyes and a flighty nature. A boy that was harsh and aggressive and so, so young and yet had clearly seen the world in all of its horror.

Quackity doesn’t want to lose Sapnap but he doesn’t know if he can ever trust him, love him.

“Did you ever try to run?” He asks, quietly, defeated and Sapnap snorts, losing the tension in his shoulders.

“All the fucking time.” He breathes, scuffing the toe of his boot across the rooftop. “Dream found our files once, when he snuck out of the handcuffs. He found out he had a mother - a real one, on the outside - and they kept trying to erase it but it made me curious and I was stubborn. I wanted to know if I had a mother too. Got so pissed when they started to burn the files, worried we’d all try and read them.”

He pauses, looks up at the sky and sighs. “I kept trying to run. Dream and I were always the stubborn ones but Dream was good. He listened, he completed his missions. I was the hot-headed one.”

“You are pretty hot,” Karl mutters and Quackity laughs as Sapnap rolls his eyes, ears burning red.

“Thanks,” he says but his tone is still solemn as he looks away and breathes, “I was being watched all the time. The mission involving Las Nevadas, that- that was my last chance before-“

He falls quiet and Quackity pauses. He tilts his head as Sapnap looks at the rooftop, boot rubbing back and forth. Karl looks confused as Quackity tries to work it out in his mind.

Until he remembers what Sapnap said about the others that tried to run.

“They would’ve killed you,” Quackity breathes, voice so quiet and Karl pales dramatically as Quackity pleads to be wrong. Just this once, let him be wrong.

But he’s not. Sapnap’s silence as his shoulders climb to his ears are enough to prove Quackity’s theory correct.

“Sap-“ Karl whispers and Sapnap shakes his head.

“The others don’t know,” he says, voice low and pained. “I never told them. Tommy blowing up the facility and the chair and the file room - he saved my life without knowing.”

“Sap,” Karl tries again but Sapnap is focused on the floor.

“I wasn’t giving them good enough information on Las Nevadas and they were trying to pull me in but I wouldn’t- I refused and they tried to make me forget you but I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t!”

Sapnap’s shoulders shake and Quackity’s mind is made up.

Sapnap is a Russian assassin, yes. He’s dangerous and he’s killed a lot of people.

But Quackity created an empire built on corruption. Hell, he started as a lawyer for a literal mob boss who’s conveniently married to Death. He’s employed mercenaries and is friends with Villains.

Quackity isn’t a good person. Karl is. Karl is the light at the end of the tunnel, the Hero to Quackity’s morally grey values and beliefs.

And Sapnap is... He’s Sapnap.

Quackity loved Nick. He thinks, with a little time, he could love Sapnap, too.

Quackity steps up to Sapnap, slowly because he is a dangerous individual and he’d rather not get injured for his troubles. Sapnap lifts his head to watch and Quackity gets close, curling his arms around Sapnap’s waist. He pulls the warm body further against him, feeling no reluctance, and tucks his face into Sapnap’s neck.

Warm arms carefully wrap around Quackity’s back and he nuzzles closer.

“This doesn’t fix everything,” Quackity says, loud enough for Karl to also hear. “I don’t know whether to trust you and I have a lot of questions but I won’t push. Although if you lie to me again, I’ll cut your dick off.”

“Quackity!” Karl squawks, slapping him on the back as Sapnap laughs. He feels one arm detach from his back and then Karl is leaning against him, resting against the other side of Sapnap.

“I understand.” Sapnap breathes. “I missed you.”

“Big sap,” Quackity mumbles.

Karl replies, “we missed you too.”

“I do think you love us,” Quackity says when the silence stretches. “I’m sorry for being fucking cruel.”

“It’s understandable,” he murmurs back. “But Tommy’s right. You can’t- can’t fake it.”

“Good,” Karl replies.

The moment is sweet and Quackity relaxes into their arms. They do need to talk things out. This peace is fragile but Quackity has never had belief in fate, only himself.

And he believes in them.

The moment is shattered when Karl says, “can we go inside now? I’m cold.”

He is Seventeen. That’s his name at the start and he is the weakest in his class.

He does not have the strength of Eight, the stamina of Twenty-six. He is small and thin, dark eyes and dark hair and skin as pale as the snow outside of the facility.

He may be the weakest but he likes to think he’s the smartest.

He is the weakest and so the others make no move to try and eliminate him. He’s but easy prey, someone they can ignore. He poses no threat to his classmates.

As for the trials and tribulations he’s put through, he’s average at best. Purposely so. He manifested his abilities quicker than the rest, he knows he never misses a shot and so he does. Occasionally.

To be in the top, is to be a threat to his classmates. To be in the bottom, is to be a weak link to his teachers.

So Seventeen remains blissfully in the middle.

He is quiet and cold. He does not make friends with his classmates. He watches the older agents and listens when they speak.

He is the weakest and yet when he is gifted his name, George, he is one of five left.

George likes being the smartest person in the room.

George survives.

Tommy doesn’t know why they’re standing outside of the orphanage, a few metres away from the doors, near a thicket of trees. He doesn’t ask why when Dream gently pulls him away from Wilbur and towards where Sapnap is walking away from Karl and Quackity.

He just waits, standing beside Corpse while Tina clings to Sykunno’s back and Minx keeps catching the knives Jack throws in mid-air.

Dream stands before them, somewhat awkwardly.

“Spit it out, Dream,” George says, with a sigh.

“Well,” Dream says in Russian and they all straighten at the use of their mother-tongue. “How old do you think you all are?”

Tommy blinks but replies, “sixteen, dickhead. Why?”

Dream waves him away and after a moment of raised eyebrows, George says, “twenty-four.”

“Twenty,” Sapnap says, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“We’re twenty-three,” Minx says, gesturing between her and Corpse.

“We’re twenty-nine,” Toast says, looking at Rae.

“I’m thirty,” Sykunno shrugs.

“I’m the oldest here,” Jack grins. “A strong thirty-one.”

“Twenty-eight,” Leslie says, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Twenty-one,” Tina grins.

“You should remember how old I am,” Brooke says to Dream, rolling her eyes. “We’re the same age.”

Dream nods, shuffles on his feet. “Yeah, twenty-two.”

He opens his mouth to say more and then pauses. He doesn’t meet their eyes, keeps his gaze somewhere over Toast’s shoulder.

“What’s wrong?” Tommy asks, quietly, wings fluttering, puffing up in dulled panic.

Dream’s shoulders hunch as he says, voice bleeding something that sounds terrifyingly enough like fear, “well, I spoke to my mom - Puffy - and she said I’m twenty-six.”

Silence immediately envelops their group as everyone collectively tenses, eyes widening.

Tommy stares at Dream, mouth opening and closing as he tries to come to terms with what that means. Especially for the older ones.

“What?” He breathes, looking at their faces and seeing nothing but a group of twenty year olds.

Jack is the oldest but how old is he? If Dream is missing four years, what does that mean for the others?

“Could you-“ Brooke pauses, frowns at him. “Are you sure she’s your mom, that you are older than you think?”

“It was in my file,” Dream says with a shrug, no defensiveness or anger. “I- I have a fake memory of killing my family so I’m guessing they wanted me to cut all possible ties.”

“Oh,” Brooke replies and then murmurs, “does that make me twenty-six?”

Dream starts to fiddle with his hands. “Well, you were a recruit when I was, so, I guess?”

Once again silence sits heavily on their shoulders.

Tommy clears his throat. “What about Niki? Shouldn’t she be here?”

Dream blinks and then turns back to the orphanage as they stand with the terrifying knowledge that they’re a lot older than they really know.

Niki follows after Dream, confused by their gathering until Rae quietly asks how old she is. Niki replies, “twenty-four. Or five. I was the Widow to George’s Huntsman. Why?”

“Puffy’s his mum,” Tommy says, when Dream can’t seem to form the words twice. Niki’s eyes widen as she looks at him. Tommy continues, “he’s four years older than he thought he was.”

”Oh,” she breathes and they all fall silent once again.

Tommy can barely breathe without feeling like it’s too much. He’s sixteen, he’s sure of it and even though it’s been months and he’s not been counting, he can’t handle it if he’s older because he can’t be and-

New Years past whilst he was out.

The date of their collective birthday they could never celebrate.

Tommy is seventeen.

Tommy’s been seventeen for a couple of months now.

He swallows, wings tightening around him as he looks at the others and sees the same terror reflected back. Each of them are trying to calculate their correct age but he can tell they’re all falling short.

How many missions have been taken because they learnt something they shouldn’t have?
How many agents ran that had to be wiped from their minds?

Even then, they had punishments that could last more than just a couple of days. The isolation chamber was used for months at a time; the sensory deprivation used to make them more compliant. How long could they have been in there?

Did they ever look in the mirror and see that their hair had been freshly cut or had grown out? Did they ever find new scars that they couldn’t remember getting? Did they ever trace those scars and try and convince themselves that they got them on that certain mission, too afraid to think of the alternatives?

Tommy looks at the oldest, at Jack and for once in his life, the man is shockingly silent and still. His face is scarily blank and he's not even blinking.

How many children has Jack seen enter through those doors to the Room and how many ended up in those unmarked graves? Was the number so high he simply stopped counting?

Tommy knows about his closest friend Felix, the one he killed for being a traitor. Does he ever say his name, forgetting he's no longer with him?

Is that why Tommy never sees the older agents pick younger ones the way Sapnap and Dream chose him? Is it because they know choosing someone is a futile attempt at trying to form an attachment that will ultimately be stolen from them?

Tommy was chosen. They wanted to get closer to him. George has always been colder, more reserved.

Has he already hit the age of seeing too much?

"Oh," Rae says, eyes still wide. "So we're all... a lot older than we thought?"

Leslie nods while Toast frowns. "Sounds like it."

"We've lost years," Sykunno breathes. Corpse reaches for him and Sykunno easily leans into his side.

Tommy's wings flutter in distress and Sapnap is pulling him into his chest, warm hand on his neck.

George is silent and Dream is frowning and Tommy doesn't know what to do, what to think or feel.

"Niki," Tommy breathes, gaining all of their attention. "Puffy only looks to be in her late twenties. How?"

"She controls probabilities," Niki explains, quietly. Her eyes are glued to Dream. "She can make herself age slower in the same way she can heal herself."

Tommy nods as Dream blinks at her. Puffy is older than she looks, too. Only she most definitely knows how old she truly is. None of them here do. It's just another thing they've lost: their names, their birthdays, their past relatives, and now their ages.

They stand there in silence until Phil calls them back, asking if they're okay.

They easily fall into a line, walking back into the orphanage with chins raised and shoulders back. Tommy notices as he walks that his veins are no longer glowing gold.

No one has the strength to lie and say that they're fine.

Chapter End Notes

As for their ages, some are closer to their IRL ages but others are not ;)

Got some insight and KARLNAPITY MY BELOVED <3

Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

We're back!!

TW// child death mention, past child abuse, past brainwashing, rape implications (none shown), forced surgeries mention, forced sterilisation mention, blood and injury, mental health discussions, violence, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She hates missions involving marks that need to be spoken to before she can kill them. They're always so touchy, so close and it makes her swallow the bile in her throat, as she struggles to keep the pretty smile she's been trained to have on her face.

As much as she wants to stop, she can't. She has a mission and so she completes it. Sometimes that means using her siren voice, sometimes that means spending a long time in the shower after a mission, scrubbing her skin until it's red and raw.

It all stops, however, when she meets him.

He's quick-witted and the way he speaks to her Handlers nearly makes her laugh at the pure disrespect he shows. Either he doesn't know who he's dealing with or he doesn't care.

It's not a surprise when she's sent after him, rifle in hand.

It is a surprise when she can't pull the trigger.

It's not a surprise when he follows her to a cafe in Bucharest.

It is a surprise when he doesn't take the shot.

Instead, he sits opposite her and asks for her name.

That day when she comes in from the cold, she becomes more than the Black Widow.

She becomes Niki.

Phil doesn't sleep. He can't.

Puffy's son, the baby he searched for, is one of Tommy's brothers. Dream. Phil's mildly dubious of this but the man seems amicable for his blood to be tested, so long as the sample is destroyed afterwards and Phil has doctors coming in the morning. Along with the best psychologists he has on his payroll.

Quackity and Karl have their fiancé back. Sappnap, not Nick. He lingers at their sides but Phil isn't surprised if he looks up to find him beside Dream or George, standing at Tommy's shoulder, a hand on the back of his neck, a hand ruffling his hair.

And then there's Tommy. He's alive but probably not well. He eyes Wilbur with trepidation still, and doesn't seem to walk far from his brothers' sides.

His wings are in much better condition now that they're out and Phil smiles when he sees one of his brothers drag a hand through the feathers, picking out loose ones and handing them to Rae or Tina, so that they can put them in their hair. He's so glad they know how to preen.

He also finds that Jack having a couple threaded through his own hair is hilarious.

When the agents returned from their chat outside of the orphanage, they were quieter, more still, like statues who could move. Tommy doesn't mention what was said and Phil's boys don't ask, worried to shatter the fragile peace constructed between them.

Whatever it is, they easily hide it once they're inside as if to keep the children in the dark.

Their quiet mood increases when they discover the news that Sam brings up. 'The Red Room Organiser Found Dead' headline is spread across every news channel, discussions rife with rumour and while they look satisfied, they're also shiftier.

Corpse grins at the sight.

With news like that, it's only a matter of time before the wrong people hear about it. Just another reason Phil can't sleep as he tries to ensure that news coverage is being monitored.

Instead of sleeping, Phil watches as the agents let the children shower after their dinner before handcuffing them to their beds. It's a draconian sight, one that makes him want to fight the Red Room and let Tubbo release his nukes.

He doesn't show it though because Tommy is clear on who they have to be.

The children still believe this is a test and while their faith relies on Corpse - who is followed by Ethan and subsequently Mark, who has some contacts Phil is definitely going to discuss with him later - and Rae, they're still not sure about what's happening. They're the most trusted and so Phil is merely an observer to the situation as the children get handcuffed in, clearly confused.

Once the children are in their beds, with some of the agents lingering to watch over them, Phil sits down in the canteen. Tommy sits beside Dream and Techno. Phil is between Techno and Wilbur, with Tubbo and Ranboo besides him. On Dream's other side is George. Sappnap is beside Karl and Quackity.

Opposite them, Puffy sits with Sam. They both keep shooting looks to Dream, who's pretending he doesn't notice them.

"Wedding still on?" Puffy asks, lightly and Quackity snorts, sipping his coffee.

"It's paused." Karl says, holding Sapnap's hand while the man stares everyone who looks at the affection down.

The trust between them all is tenuous, fragile. Phil inhales and remembers to keep his wings relaxed as he faces the agents.

"Do you have names and ages?" Phil asks, falling into business mode. He pulls out his phone and opens up his messages to Hbomb, his glorified assistant.

George shakes his head. "When Tommy blew the facility up, the chair and the paper files were gone. They uploaded some of the main files but--"

"Most are so encrypted even I can't break it," Tubbo interrupts, head on Ranboo's shoulder, wings fluttering behind him. Phil tried to get all three of the boys to go to bed but they resisted. "The ones that aren't have little information. There's no mention of children below Tommy's age."

"I have a question about that," Puffy says, looking at Tommy. "I assume a Huntsman and a Widow graduate at the same time: so where's a sixteen year old Widow?"

Tommy swallows and says, "she didn't survive the graduation ceremony."

They all duck their heads while no sign of any grief passes the agents' faces. They simply look accepting.

"They also don't have names," George says, eyes that intense brown, almost daring them to pick a fight. "Or ages. We only know we're sixteen when we have the ceremony and we're five at the time of our first kill."

"Our birthdays are New Years," Tommy says with a shrug. "That's if they told us we were into a new year."

"What the fuck?" Wilbur mutters, fuming. None of them answer his son, they don't need to. The reality, the gravity of the situation becomes very apparent very quickly.

"They'll have numbers," Sapnap offers and Karl blinks up at him, eyes wide. Quackity grips his coffee mug tighter.

"Numbers?" Sam whispers and they all nod.

"I was Five," Tommy says.

"Twenty," Dream adds. Puffy frowns at the man, eyes becoming glassy.

"Seventeen," George says.

“Nine.” Sapnap adds. Quackity takes a hasty sip of coffee, eyes darkening harshly.

“You had a number,” Tubbo mutters to Ranboo and he rolls his eyes.

“I gathered.”

“Twenty-two.” Dream is the one that says it. When they all look to him, he doesn’t even twitch under their collective stares. “I was- I saw potential at the start. It was brief and obviously I thought you’d died in Siberia but you were Twenty-two.”

“Nice,” Tubbo says, digging his elbow into Ranboo’s ribs. “I’m writing that on your door.”

“You’re not.” Ranboo replies but his voice is light.

“Black marker for the win.”

Tommy snorts. “I’ll hold him down, you write.”

“See!” Tubbo grins, antennae flicking in joy. “Tommy will help.”

Phil’s wings flutter at his boys smiling. This is a rough conversation and as much as he’d like for the boys to leave, Ranboo is one of the recruits, even if he didn’t stay for long. He deserves to know some of what his experience might have been like.

Ranboo is one of the recruits and Tubbo wants to know to help his friends. Phil has always been too soft when it comes to his children.

“So what do you propose we do?” He asks George - the one that seems to outrank the others - and the man tilts his head.

“You can’t separate them this early on, they’ll think they’re-“ For a moment, all of them pause and then relax as George’s eyes flash. “Well,” he continues, “they might see it as a culling.”

“As for names, let them decide,” Tommy mutters. “They all probably have cover names so start giving them choices.”

“Keep a routine,” George continues. “Give them choices but keep a strict routine. Ease them into this life.”

“They’ll either tell the psychologists everything or nothing,” Sapnap informs them, picking at his nails. “They’ll start by expecting everything is a test but if you keep them together, let them slowly learn that they do have choices, they should come out of their shells more.”

“Is there topics we shouldn’t discuss?” Sam asks and they look between each other, communicating in a language the rest of them can’t understand.

Puffy looks to Phil and he shrugs. “Just because I’ve been alive for a while doesn’t mean I know languages. They evolve.”

“So you stuck to English?” She asks and he rolls his eyes.

“Piss off.”

She laughs as Wilbur and Techno mutter, “old man.”

“Shut,” Phil grumbles as George looks back to Sam.

“There’s nothing off-limits, just don’t push them. They won’t discuss hits, they won’t remember certain things at all and they probably won’t discuss the surgeries or the chair.”

“Surgeries?” Techno says and George’s face falls blank.

“All of the agents are sterilised,” he states as if what he’s saying is an easy thing to discuss.

“Well, they should be unless they’ve been informed otherwise. Some of them may have been part of the program to breed super-soldiers. All of our appendixes are removed in case they burst. Some of us had specific surgeries.”

“Like plastic surgeries, realigning broken bones, putting technology in our systems to make us stronger,” Dream adds and Phil is in a state of shock.

“They did what?” He breathes and they all look so nonchalant.

“They gave you anaesthetic if you were compliant,” Tommy murmurs and that breaks Phil to his very core.

Phil wants to ask, god, does he want to. But this peace is fragile and asking may push them too far. They’re sterilised with organs missing and bits and pieces added to make perfection.

As if they were dolls to be played with, not living, breathing people.

So he swallows it, bottles it and begins to type a message to HBomb. He’s already informed the psychologists but this should stop them from asking certain questions.

“As for a routine, they need to still be taught.” George says. “Their training-“

Immediately, everyone starts to loudly disagree but George doesn’t even flinch. He simply closes his mouth, raises his eyebrows and leans back in his chair. Tommy snorts, fingers going back to brushing through his wings.

“Shut,” Phil says. He doesn’t shout, he doesn’t even raise his voice. He simply speaks with all of the authority the Angel has and they all quieten. Looking to George, he asks, “their training?”

“I’m not suggesting we continue to train them how to kill,” George says, deadpan. “But we can’t immediately give them colouring books and soft toys. We had a routine, a strict one, and we should enforce some of that.”

“Ballet?” Sapnap asks and both Karl and Quackity blink at him. “Definitely some form of exercise.”

“You know ballet?” Karl asks and Sapnap smiles at him, something soft.

“It was compulsory,” he says like everything else wasn’t, like Phil is learning about names being numbers and forced surgeries and children losing their childhoods completely.

With each passing comment, Ranboo is becoming more pale and Sam’s mask continues to smoke in anger.

“They’ll need teachers,” Dream adds, quietly. “Languages should be familiar.”

Phil types out another message saying he needs vetted teachers. A lot of vetted teachers. Possibly a ballet instructor.

“Wait,” Tommy blinks up at George. “Don’t they need their trackers removed?”

Sapnap groans as Dream sighs.

“Trackers?” Sam asks and Tommy nods.

“I picked mine out in Ukraine.” Tommy says and then shifts his shirt and combat trousers to show the thin line on his hip. “Don’t worry, I can’t catch infections so the blade didn’t need to be disinfected.”

Phil is going to have an aneurysm.

“You cut into your skin to remove it?” Puffy breathes and Tommy nods, frowning at her.

“Yeah? What else was I suppose to do?”

“Not- not do that?” She says and he frowns at her.

“What? It wasn’t like there were many doctors I could contact to get it out.”

Sam stares at him, smoke pouring from his mask and Phil knows if he ever wants to adopt the boy, he’d have to fight Sam for the rights.

He types doctors in a message to HBomb and rolls his eyes at the panicked screeching from his assistant. He sends a different message to Ponk, who’s quick to respond that he’s free and he’s on his way.

Phil’s going to end up having a whole team of workers by the end of this.

“Is there anybody coming for you with those trackers in?” Wilbur asks and George shakes his head.

“Eret controlled them so with them dead... it shouldn’t be a problem.” George looks to Sapnap and then Dream. “We might have to go back, though. There’s a lot of technology left over that could be salvageable with lists of other organisations linked.”

Tommy snorts. “That’s the plan?”

Sapnap's eyes spark. "C'mon. It'll be fun."

"Do you not remember the mudslide incident or am I crazy?" Dream mutters but there's a smirk to his lips and Sapnap laughs.

"That was fun!"

Techno huffs. "Please tell me you're not going to find these other organisations and hunt them down? At least, not without support."

Phil groans as Wilbur cheers. "Like Spain all over again!"

"Phil," Puffy says with a smile. "Please control your sons."

"Hey," Phil replies. "If they want to blow up some governments and commit minor terrorism... well, I'm just not going to get involved."

Quackity grins, looks to Sapnap as Karl sighs. "I have a couple of contacts who like blowing shit up."

"Does that mean-?" Tubbo breathes and Wilbur and Techno light up.

"Hell fucking yes," Wilbur hisses. "I've always wanted to--"

"We're not creating a nuclear winter." Ranboo pleads.

"But think of the possibilities!" Tubbo grins up at him, wings fluttering excitedly.

"You have nuclear codes?" Sapnap asks Tubbo and the boy nods. Immediately, George and Dream seem to zero in on Tubbo, gazes sharp and Phil reaches over for the boy, raising his eyebrows at the men.

"Tubbo," Phil says, calmly. "Maybe don't tell the ex-assassins about the fact you have nuclear codes."

Tommy must see Phil's look because he mutters something harshly in a language he doesn't understand and all three of them jerk back as if slapped. Tommy narrows his eyes and Dream replies in a soothing manner, speaking quickly but calmly until Tommy grins.

"Good." He says, winks at Phil. "Are obstacle courses a normal kid activity?"

"Obstacle courses are fine," he says.

"We'll have to enforce a no killing rule," Dream mutters offhandedly and the rest of them tense. "They might still think it's okay."

Phil definitely needs a vacation after this. Maybe twelve.

A no killing rule? They need that? It makes his throat close up and his wings tighten around him. He wonders if reviving Eret only to kill them again is possible.

“No competitions - that will spook them,” Sapnap replies, eyes narrowed. “They’ll think it’s a test.”

“Then that’s what we tell them,” Tommy says, leaning back in his chair. “No killing and competitions are like the outside world: no one dies if they lose.”

Phil meets Wilbur’s fuming gaze as Techno sits too still. They’re all tense and even Tubbo is quiet, watching them, briefly looking at Ranboo.

Phil knows enough about his son to see his thought process. Ranboo and Tommy were in the same class, which means only one would live. Ranboo’s alive out of sheer luck.

As if noticing them again, George straightens, looks between Puffy and Phil.

“What do we owe you?” He asks, calmly. “We have money.”

“Mate,” Phil says, desperately, “I told you. You don’t us anything.”

“But there’s no gain if you help us.” Dream mutters. “You have an army of assassins and you want to rehabilitate them?”

“Hopefully all of you,” Phil says, lightly.

“You’re the Angel of Death,” George says, eyes intense and Phil knows he’s a sniper from that stare. “You’re the leader of the Syndicate, the biggest organised crime family in the world. You’re a Villain.”

“But I’m not a dick,” Phil replies, not trying to hide anything on his face. He needs them to see, to understand. “They’re children and you’re all, said with no offence, traumatised. I’m not looking for profit - I’m making money even as we sit here and I despise anything involving human trafficking - I’m simply trying to help. Like we said in the plane: you’re free to make you’re own choices. I want to help and you don’t have to trust my word on that but trust my actions.”

“Seconded,” Puffy says, fixing George with her own intense stare. “The Heroes are backing you and I’m more than capable of involving the media if the government tries anything. This won’t be easy - people are going to be asking uncomfortable questions and there may be some trials but everything involving you and the children will be run by you. Only in emergencies will we make executive decisions without your say.”

“I’ve fought a government before, mate,” Phil adds. “Multiple actually. I’ll gladly do it again.”

For a second they’re all quiet, staring at him. Tommy’s wings are twitching, a small smile tugging at his lips. Phil wants to envelope him in his wings but he resists the urge.

“I don’t trust you,” George states, firmly, even as his shoulders remain a line of tension. “I don’t trust any of you but Tommy vouches for you-“

“Well, I did kill-“ Tommy mutters.

“Toms,” Wilbur interrupts him. “If it meant saving your life, you can shoot me as many times as you like.”

“-which means I don’t have a reason to distrust you.” George finishes.

“You can put your faith in me,” Phil breathes, vehemently. “And I have all the time in the world for you to see that.”

George nods and relaxes. Sapnap sighs as Dream leans back. It’s a start. Phil smiles.

Tommy, sensing the new calm atmosphere, leans in to Ranboo. “I just wanted to say,” he speaks quietly, honestly, “I don’t know who would’ve won out of us but you’re alive, okay? I know this all seems fucking messed up and insane but you survived.”

“By the sounds of it, I teleported myself away. I didn’t survive anything. I don’t remember any of it,” Ranboo hisses and Tommy’s eyes burn.

“Good,” Tommy snaps. “It was fucking hell and shit and every other goddamn terrible word but you still lived. Twenty-eight to two. Running away was survival as much as being complicit and quiet.”

“Tommy,” Ranboo breathes but the boy shakes his head, wings puffing up.

“If you ever start to remember, you’re always free to talk to me, okay? I’ll bully you on everything else but that.”

Phil notes on his phone that he might have to inform Ranboo’s therapist about this. The boy is clearly dealing with survivor’s guilt of an experience he doesn’t remember.

“No one is looking at you any different, Boo,” Tubbo says, smiling up at him. “If they are, I’ll nuke them.”

“I’ll knock them out,” Tommy adds.

Ranboo ducks his head. “Thank you.”

“Anytime,” Tubbo replies, curling up beside him.

“I suppose that’s everything for tonight?” Puffy asks, smiling at the display before looking at Dream and he smiles at her, softly.

“The workers should be here by morning,” Phil says, looks to Wilbur. “Can you-“

“I’ll double check and brief any one that enters, yes.” Wilbur says, grinning up at Techno. “So long as I get bodyguard rights.”

Techno rolls his eyes. “Can’t wait.”

“You think you’ll need security?” Sapnap asks and Quackity snorts.

“The Syndicate both run businesses like real estate but also they’re the biggest Villains in America. Every wants to see if they can kill the unkillable.”

“I assume you want to police yourselves?” Phil asks and George nods. “I can’t promise that people won’t come looking but I promise that anyone who tries anything will be dealt with accordingly.”

He looks to Puffy, smirk to his lips and she laughs. “This is one Villain activity the Heroes can look over.”

Phil doesn’t sleep that night. Neither does Wilbur or Techno. They plan and they talk and Tommy sits huddled under Wilbur’s arm, wing curled around Wilbur’s back.

Phil hopes, as he talks to HBomb about arrival times and transport, that this can be the start of something new. Something good.

Something that sounds like family.

Dream likes being paired with Corpse on missions. The deep voice and dry wit has Dream wheezing more than he’d like to admit and Corpse seems to at least find Dream’s presence an easy one.

Corpse is used to solo missions, Dream can tell by the way Corpse keeps forgetting Dream is lurking beside him. Dream just rolls his eyes, nudging him every time, careful to not touch his skin.

Standing in Brazil, is the complete opposite of Russia. The heat brings rain, not the snow that Dream is used to. Not that he mentions it, even as Corpse shifts in his jacket, frowning at the sun like it’s personally offended him.

The mission is relatively simple.

Dream’s the distraction: he needs to cause a couple of mudslides, maybe a minor earthquake. Corpse is here to touch the minister and get him to hand over some documents.

It’s supposed to be easy.

The brief did not mention three children, who cower behind their nanny as Corpse freezes in place.

Dream has never seen Corpse freeze before. It almost makes him want to freeze too, to follow like a deer in headlights but he can’t. Dream can’t because he has to get them both out of here.

Later, he’ll tell himself that the punishment of losing an asset like Corpse made him move but he knows it’s a lie. He likes Corpse, even if friendship is forbidden.

But for now, he raises his gun and pushes it to the side of the nanny's head as she pleads for them to let the children live.

"They will," he replies, calmly in Portuguese. "You all will if you do exactly what I tell you."

Making sure to keep her in eye-line, he grabs the back of Corpse's neck and shakes him, ignoring the warning his Handlers gave to never have skin on skin contact. The man twitches, dark eyes panicked and Dream doesn't know what's happening but he can't ask. Not here. Not now.

"Snap out of it," he hisses in Russian. "We have a job to do."

Corpse is aware enough to touch them, to make them sleep and forget they ever existed. Dream finds the minister, pushes Corpse into action and then pulls him out of there.

Corpse never tells him why he froze and Dream never asks.

They complete the mission. That's all that matters.

With old Russian style turrets and the large courtyard with the Stalin statue, Chandler can't help but grin at the sight of the original Red Room.

It's warmer than Russia in Belarus and Chandler, nodding to his bodyguards, steps past the large red doors and into the foyer. He's here for a reason - especially after seeing the empty nature of the Siberian Room.

A Widow is waiting for him with short, choppy brown hair and dark, almost grey eyes that sparkle with warmth.

Chandler knows that warmth is artificial though, even if it's extremely realistic.

"Sir," they greet.

"I'm guessing Jimmy called ahead," he says and they smile at him.

They both know if Chandler wasn't supposed to be here, their car would've been shot at before they could even make the gates.

"He's waiting for you, sir," they say and then flit away, light on their feet as the ballet dancer they are.

Chandler and his men follow, up a flight of stairs, past a few dance studios. Rounding a corner, the Widow knocks once and then opens the door, gesturing for Chandler to go in.

When his bodyguards try and follow, they block their movement. "Only you," they say in a sweet tone and Chandler swallows, nodding for his bodyguards to wait outside.

The Widow follows as he enters the room, closing the door behind him.

Wooden floors and a large desk facing the floor to ceiling windows (definitely reinforced glass). Behind the desk, up a set of steps, a bar sits on an elevated platform. It's an open room, breathable and elegant.

Everything is red and gold. Soviet supremacy.

Unlike Chris and himself, Jimmy is a defector from America, even if he still uses his contacts from over there.

Seeing the colours, seeing the old style Russian architecture has him smiling slightly, even if it's paired with bile rising in his throat. He was never an agent, never blessed with abilities like they were.

He thinks he had it better than them, though. He was found by Jimmy, given a good job and a good family. He never had to fight to survive. So long as he was Jimmy's right hand man, he was safe to exist in this world of crime and wealth.

"You're one of Beast's boys," the man at the desk says, pulling Chandler from his thoughts and he turns, meets red eyes surrounded by black scleras. Tusks stick out from his mouth and oval ears poke out from short, rosewood hair, littered with gold earrings. There is also a gold septum piercing that instantly draws his attention before he snaps his gaze back up to those eyes.

"Yes," Chandler says, straightening, clearing his throat. "Sir."

The man's lips quirk at that. "Name?"

"Chandler, Sir."

"Chandler," he repeats, almost savouring it on his tongue. "You're here because Eret's dead, yes? Well. That's the least of our troubles but you needn't worry yourselves. Everything is covered."

Chandler blinks, confused. "The Siberian Room is empty, the workers have ran - all of the agents and recruits--"

"Are not your concern," he says, firmly and Chandler shudders, feeling the Widow staring at the side of his skull, waiting for an order to kill without remorse, without hesitation. "Clara was smart when she suggested separating the old from the young. She just wasn't smart enough to pick the older agents."

Chandler forces himself to laugh along with the man before him, fear beginning to curl low in his stomach. He forgot what this man was like, forgot what it felt like to be under those intense eyes.

Maybe sensing his urge to run, the man smiles. "If you're truly worried, I'm sure Squid would be happy to join you. He misses his tank."

Chandler swallows, nods. "Thank you, Sir."

The man's grin widens as he turns to the Widow. "Sqaishey, please escort Chandler back to his car and then you may join Lady on her mission." Turning back to Chandler, he says as he types something on a screen on his desk, "Squid should be waiting by your car when you get there. Enjoy your trip back, Chandler."

Chandler leaves feeling more uneasy than when he arrived.

Chapter End Notes

Niki, and Corpse and Dream past!!

Also,,, Chandler speaking to someone very important... hmmm

Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Some lore ;)

TW// mental health discussion, past brainwashing, past child abuse, suicidal thoughts, forced surgeries mention, blood and injury, body horror, arachnophobia warning, violence, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For a couple of days, they work out a routine.

They stick to the times the Room gave them and they have teachers and psychologists and whoever else Phil can find. The children learn to not be afraid, learn that this isn't some test.

Just like when Ponk and his team of doctors and nurses started to extract the trackers—

(Tommy clocks it the minute the boy - Shroud, the name given between gritted teeth and wild eyes - shifts, eyes narrowing ever so slightly. Ponk is talking in the background, something soothing and calm but Tommy keeps his attention firmly on the recruit.

He pushes himself up from the chair, leans over Ponk's shoulder while keeping eyecontact with Shroud. "Ponk," Tommy says, interrupting Ponk's rambling. "Can you explain that again?"

Ponk just grins. "Sure! So—"

Shroud sits back, eyes shifting from eager to something more calculating. Tommy has staked his claim, shown the boy that Ponk is someone not to be messed with. Especially not with Tommy here.

He still remembers when Ponk was confused at the need for the agents to sit in with the doctors during their tracker extraction. He thought they were watching him and his staff.

He couldn't be more wrong.

Sure, having a chaperone means the agents can ensure the recruits' safety but the main point was ensuring the doctors' safety.

"Right," Ponk says, spins in his chair to face Shroud. "I'm going to give you this mild anaesthetic, which will numb the area and then I'll make a shallow cut to remove the tracker

before putting the butterfly strips over it. All good?"

Shroud looks wary but he nods, fists clenching and unclenching at his sides. Tommy's glad his clone, not twin, is lingering outside and not with them. That thing - it isn't a boy, not with its dead eyes and fake skin - gives Tommy the creeps. Corpse had mentioned the fake boy is filled with spiders and while Tommy knows he isn't lying, he truly doesn't want to find out if that is true.

So Tommy lingers at Ponk's shoulder as he walks over with the injection.

"Laying down will make this easier," Ponk says and the boy hesitantly lies back, shifting his shirt to give access to his hip.

"I'm going to feel around for it, okay?" Ponk says and Shroud nods, watching his every move as Ponk, with gloves on, prods at his hip before humming. "Now the injection. Just relax, it'll feel like a pinch."

The needle goes in and Ponk presses the plunger before removing it. Shroud doesn't even twitch or blink.

It's unnecessary - the pain will be short lived and Shroud has lived long enough to experience worse pain than a tiny cut - but the doctors insist and Tommy knows his argument is flawed.

Ponk tests the area and when Shroud merely blinks at Ponk, the doctor makes a quick cut and pops the tracker out. There's less blood than Tommy expected - he did rummage around his own hip for the tracker - and Ponk drops the tracker, picks up the butterfly strips and covers the wound.

Shroud doesn't even twitch.

"All good!" Ponk says and Shroud slips off of the bed. "It should heal within a few days but don't move too much or you'll aggravate it."

Shroud leaves and Tommy relaxes.)

— everything falls into place.

The agents stop shadowing the teachers, knowing they're in safe hands. They start to branch out.

George, who spends his time at Dream's side whenever he's not with Puffy—

(Dream meets Drista and Foolish outside of the orphanage, under a canopy of oak trees. He's nervous, restless and can feel George watching from the window, prepared to step in if Dream needs him to.

Because Dream doesn't know how he'll react to seeing his siblings - the blood tests prove they're related - considering his only memory is of killing them.

A car pulling up has him tensing as Puffy steps out of the driver's side. The passenger door opens to reveal a blonde girl wearing a green hoodie and black jeans. The door next to her's opens and a man steps out with golden hair and eyes like a swirling sea.

Dream can see the resemblance and he remembers the fight back outside of the Syndicate's warehouse, knows their credentials from the Room's teaching. Totem and Chaos. Foolish and Drista.

"Dream," Puffy says and he doesn't try to hide his anxious twitching. It's best if they think he's human and not a Huntsman Spider. "Meet Drista and Foolish. They're your younger sister and older brother."

"I thought we were a handful?" Drista asks and Puffy rolls her eyes as Foolish snorts.

"Hi!" Foolish greets with a wave. His smile is easy, calm. He's nearly as tall as Dream. "Don't mind Drista, she's always—"

"If you say moody or hormonal, I will delete your entire room and spawn bats," she interrupts with a hiss, only to smile at Dream. "Hey. You're not what I expected."

"Drista," Puffy snaps but Dream finds himself relaxing.

"It's fine," he says, his accent already shifting to mimic theirs. "I get this is— well, this is probably insane."

"That's putting it lightly," Foolish says but his smile has yet to waiver.

"You're an assassin, huh?" Drista asks, bluntly, speaking even as Puffy snaps her name once again. "That's cool. Can you teach me to throw knives?"

He meets Puffy's eyes before looking back at his sister. His alive and breathing, little sister. "Why would I do that?"

"Because Wilbur taught Fundy but no one is teaching me!" She pauses, tilts her head. "You'd be my favourite brother?"

"Hey!" Foolish shouts, even as he laughs.

Dream rolls his eyes. "Maybe when you're older."

"You're no fun." She pouts but Puffy is grinning at him and Dream doesn't feel on edge.

He feels in control.

He feels like he's a part of something bigger, something better, something that leads to a future that's brighter than he could ever imagine.

He's around family.)

— while Sapnap mostly stays with Karl and Quackity.

And Tommy spends his days with Wilbur and Techno, Ranboo and Tubbo because Phil has to work while here. He is running a business.

It's good, it's healthy or at least, as healthy and as good as it can be.

But Tommy is not used to this.

He can see it in the other agent's eyes that they're not used to it either and try as Phil and Puffy might, none of them accept therapists.

Well, Tommy has to because if not Techno manhandles him into a room with his therapist. Who he ignores. So they spend an hour with her trying to speak and Tommy hunched on himself, unwilling to breathe.

After those sessions, he climbs up to the roof - his wings are weak from being hidden for so long - and sits in the sky.

They've yet to find him and the agents don't bother to try and approach. They all have their own methods of coping - George's silence and Dream's isolation and Sapnap's fire - and they don't push.

He's surprised when Purpled climbs up, purple hoodie thrown over his head, blond hair blowing in the breeze.

"I'm fine," he says before Purpled can ask and the boy rolls his eyes.

"That's a lie but okay."

Tommy scoffs but watches as he sits beside him, leaning back on his hands, face to the sky. Tommy waits for the boy to push, to ask, to do something but he doesn't. He simply slumps beside Tommy, hands behind his head and he closes his eyes.

Tommy finds that he's holding his breath.

Purpled is showing his throat, his eyes are closed, he's lax and Tommy can't spot any weapons on him. He's so incredibly vulnerable and Tommy is a trained assassin.

"Are you fucking stupid?" He finds himself asking and Purpled cracks one eye open to glare at him.

"You're stupid." He replies, eye closing one again. "I'm a genius. I'm so smart."

"I could kill you."

"But you won't," he sings.

"I could," Tommy hisses and can see the way he's rolling his eyes under his eyelids.

"Nah," he replies. "You won't."

Tommy stares at him and wants to fight back. He wants to snap and hiss and bite, prove that he's as bad as he says he is.

But he likes Purpled and he's clearly not concerned with getting stabbed in the stomach.

Tommy sighs, slides down so that his wings are pinned beneath him. It's also a vulnerable move but Tommy could still fight Purpled off.

Maybe that's the problem. Maybe he doesn't want to fight anymore.

"Why did you come up here?" He asks and Purpled hums.

"Heard you've been dodging your therapist." He comments, as honest and as blunt as ever. "Also thought I'd catch a tan while I'm up here."

Tommy laughs to spite himself and a smile tugs at Purpled's lips. "Fuck off," Tommy mumbles, halfheartedly, looks to the clouds. "I've not been dodging her. I don't know what the fuck I'm supposed to say to her."

"You can just talk about recently," Purpled suggests. "You don't immediately have to go into the depths of your past."

"The depths of my past happened recently, dick," Tommy says, fondly and then turns his head, frowns at him. "How do you know what happens at therapy?"

Purpled blinks his eyes open, tilting his head to show Tommy the look of utter exasperation on his face. "This may be a shock," Purpled says, slowly, sarcastically, "but I go to therapy."

"What? Why?"

"Why do you go to therapy?" Purpled hits back and when Tommy frowns at him, Purpled rolls his eyes, goes back to closing them. "Yeah, you don't ask those questions. In the very-not-cool section of asking stuff."

"Oh," Tommy mutters, dumbly. "Sorry."

Purpled scoffs. "Could put a bit more feeling into it but I'll allow it for now."

Tommy glares at him. Purpled doesn't even twitch. Tommy goes back to looking at the clouds. The silence isn't an uncomfortable one, it's just there.

"Punz practically raised me," Purpled says, after a pause. "Our mom- well, she's currently wanted by like half of America and our dad is doing life in Pittsburgh."

Tommy wants to ask. He doesn't.

"I work for Quackity even if you might think it's because Punz is overprotective and wants to watch over me," he says, eyes closed, body relaxed, like these are facts and have no emotional control over him. "My sixth birthday present was my mom teaching me how to

count cards. Dad took Punz out to teach him to shoot. It's always good to have someone in a casino that knows the tricks. That's what Punz told Quackity so he'd hire both of us."

Tommy pauses and then says, "I don't think I can count cards."

They weren't taught it and if they were, Tommy doesn't remember it.

Purpled grins, turning his head to look at him. "You teach me a language, I'll teach you to count cards."

Tommy smiles, finds himself relaxing. "Deal."

Purpled turns back to the sky, eyes open. "Therapy is hard," he admits, quietly. "Quackity told us it was free of charge - he gives all his staff free healthcare, if you remember- wait, did he even give you a contract?"

Tommy laughs. "No. Fucking- I don't think we even- I just showed up, said I could pick pockets and he just let me in."

"Oh my god," Purpled sighs. "No wonder you're the way you are."

"What's that supposed to fucking mean?" Tommy snaps but there's no bite, no vitriol. He feels light, in control.

Purpled merely looks him up and down and frowns. "Never mind."

Tommy hits him on the stomach - light, always light because if he's learnt one thing from his brothers, it's how to pull punches - and Purpled immediately retaliates. For a second, it's just spiralling limbs and half-hearted hits.

"You're not helping your case," Purpled huffs after a couple of minutes.

"Bite me, bitch," Tommy replies and Purpled just scoffs.

"Anyway," he says, leaning back, like a lion relaxing in the sun. "Therapy is hard and Punz and I both didn't want to talk about what we went through. We survived. Our parents are gone, it's just us- it's always been just us, really. But once you start talking- once you start, it helps."

"But how can they ever understand?" Tommy asks, confused and conflicted and Purpled gives him a serious, honest look.

"They might never understand. I mean, some of the stuff I've lived through, I don't understand. But the point is that you learn together, you learn to leave stuff where it is - in the past - or you learn how to move past it." Purpled's eyes are surprisingly soft. "It's going to hurt and suck but you've survived through worse. Some would say that it makes you stronger but one of the points of therapy is: you don't have to always be strong. You don't have to handle your baggage alone."

Tommy swallows, looks away. "She's going to be horrified."

“Phil employed her,” Purpled replies, just as light as before. “That means she definitely knows about this life. She could be Wilbur’s therapist or Techno’s or even Phil’s. If she can’t handle it, Phil will find someone who can because there’s always someone who can.”

Tommy blinks back tears. This is stupid, he’s stupid. Purpled could never understand and yet- And yet Tommy can trust Purpled’s words. He likes Purpled. He wants to trust him.

“You’re not alone, Tommy,” Purpled says, voice firm.

“I don’t know how to rely on other people,” Tommy breathes back and Purpled reaches for him, every move telegraphed. He grips Tommy’s hand in his, oddly warm.

“I didn’t either. I only ever relied on myself or Punz. But once you start, it gets easier.”

Tommy remembers what Kristin said as they stood in Tommy’s afterlife. He says, quietly, “a leap of faith.”

Purpled hums. “Yeah. A leap of faith into emotions.”

“Gross.”

Their laughter rings out across the roof and into the sky. Tommy’s chest isn’t as heavy and he relaxes back, squeezing Purpled’s hand.

He can do this.

Dream doesn’t know when he starts seeing George as more than a fellow Spider. He’s always respected him more than the others, and there’s something magnetising about him.

It could be the dark eyes. It could be the way his lips quirk when he’s pretending to find something not funny. It could be the huff of laughter or his hatred of driving or the way he becomes as still as the rifle he holds.

It could be anything but Dream finds out that maybe he’s more interested in George than he is with the marks he’s sent to, especially considering Dream is used as a honeypot. He thinks George is so pretty but his Handlers think the wavy, blond hair and green eyes combination make Dream the best asset for the job.

He doesn’t tell him.

Dream knows what happens to fraternisers. He’s seen their bodies strung up. He knows that any form of expressing affection without prior approval is punishable.

So he squashes the urge to hold his hand, to cup his face, to tell him that he cares. He pushes it all down and refuses to comment on it.

Until one mission has Dream bleeding out, hunched over George's shoulder as he shoots at their pursers.

"Just leave me," Dream mutters into his ear, smearing blood into his hair. "Make it quick--"

"Shut the fuck up," George snarls and Dream doesn't think he's ever heard George swear. "Don't you dare die on me."

"But the mission--"

"Fuck the mission!" George hisses, manhandling him into a car and then disappearing.

Dream blacks out and when he comes to, he's in a grimy-looking hotel, George beside him, dark eyes flooding with something. Something Dream doesn't understand. Something Dream is scared to see.

"Hi, Georgie," he mutters. "Did you--"

George curls up next to him, face buried in Dream's neck as he mutters, "I care about you, too, asshole. We're partners."

Partners. Dream's breath catches. Partners, they're partners. He risks brushing a kiss onto George's forehead and gets squeezed tighter.

"You're not dying without me," George whispers and Dream stares at the yellow ceiling and grins.

When they head back, their touches are quick and their glances are brief. It burns Dream but he would burn for eternity to keep this.

So long as George remains at his side, he doesn't care because he has him. That's all that matters.

The room looks the same: soft pastel colours, the comfy sofa filled with cushions, the beanbag in the corner drowning in stuffed animals and her chair. His therapist. Michelle.

"You asked to speak to me?" She asks, sitting in front of him. Her purple hair is tied into a bun and Tommy loses count of the piercings decorating her ears and nose. Large brown eyes blink at him from behind thick glasses and he smiles at her.

"I wanted to apologise," he says and she quirks an eyebrow at him. "I've been a dick to you when you're just trying to help me."

She smiles at him. "I accept your apology, thank you for giving me one."

He shrugs, looks down and starts to drag his fingers through his secondary feathers. "I don't trust... trust anyone with my mind."

“You control the narrative in these sessions, Tommy,” she says, leaning back. “I can’t physically get inside your mind, I have no abilities so-“

“Wait,” Tommy darts just gaze up. “If you don’t have abilities then why does Phil employ you?”

“Because I’m good at my job,” she replies back with a smirk and Tommy snorts. “I was originally Fundy’s therapist before I became Wilbur’s. Now I’m yours. And much like I’ve told them, unless I believe you’re a risk to yourself or others, anything said in this room, stays in this room.”

“I’m literally an assassin,” Tommy deadpans. “I’m always a risk to others. And I can’t physically kill myself - even with Eret gone, I feel like dying isn’t an option anymore since I killed the woman - so I’m never going to be a risk to myself.”

She rolls her eyes. “Tommy, I am the therapist of Morningstar. I’m capable of dealing with clients who deal with homicidal urges and thoughts. This is the nature of living in the crime world. But this risk is more of killing or harming others because of a breakdown.”

“What then?” Tommy asks, tilting his head. “It’s not like you can manhandle me into a fucking straight jacket.”

Her eyes are soft when she says, “no, but I would inform Phil or whoever is your legal guardian so that we can discuss measures to keep you and your friends and family safe.”

For a long moment, he studies her. She merely looks back, doesn’t flinch at the intensity of his eyes.

“I’m a monster,” he states like a fact.

“Monsters don’t think they’re monsters, Tommy,” she replies. “Monsters don’t feel, they don’t care.”

“But I don’t mourn the classmates I lost,” he says, “I don’t mourn the people I killed.”

“That sounds like repression,” she replies, voice calm but there’s no pity on her face. He’s glad. It eases something in his chest. “You’re purposely not letting yourself think about it in fear of the repercussions. I’m assuming the Red Room didn’t let you cry or express yourself?”

He should walk away now. Talking about it, discussing it, feels wrong. It feels like he’s back in that torture chair, being told that no information should pass his lips or he’ll be a traitor.

But Tommy is already a traitor.

And he doesn’t want to feel like this, feel like his chest is being stepped on, feel like his ribs are curling tighter around his lungs and heart, cutting off blood flow and oxygen.

Tommy wants to be free.

And the Room will never leave him, will always be a part of him but that does not mean he cannot heal.

“They said it was weakness,” he breathes, voice quiet, not meeting her eyes. “Any weakness was punishable. Huntsman Spiders aren’t weak.”

“Do you think it’s weak talking to me?” She asks and he shrugs. She rephrases, “why don’t you want to speak to me about your thoughts?”

He wants to immediately say it’s because his thoughts are terrible. He plots exits of every room he enters, planning how to kill every person in said room in order to escape. Every time, the thoughts float in on what weapons he can improvise, which person he needs to drop first.

But she deals with Wilbur, knows Phil and Techno. Those, to her, are probably normal thoughts that she won’t judge him for.

He was trained to calculate those things.

So he sticks to an honest answer.

“Because if we spoke out in the Room, they would punish us.” He admits, fingers fiddling with his feathers. “One of the boys in my class admitted to be scared of the dark so they placed him in the isolation chamber: no light, no sound, no anything.”

“I would never use any of your fears or thoughts against you, Tommy,” Michelle says and he shrugs again.

“I don’t know that.” He finally meets her eyes. “I don’t trust you.”

Her face remains the same: no hint or twitch of anger, annoyance. Just acceptance.

“Who do you trust?”

“My brothers,” he replies, as easy as breathing. At her eyebrow raise, he continues, “Sapnap, George and Dream.”

“Can you talk to them about your experiences?”

“They were there with me, they lived through it.”

“But that doesn’t mean they understand your experience,” she says, lightly. “Just like you don’t know the full extent to their experiences. Have you ever discussed your thoughts, your feelings?”

He wants to say yes. He has spoken to the others about the Room but she’s not wrong. George doesn’t speak about his emotions at all, rarely shows them. Sapnap is loud and aggressive with his affection but he’s never spoken about why or how. Even Dream keeps everything close.

“No,” he says, quietly and she hums.

“That’s my job,” she says, after a pause. “I’m a third party. I don’t know what it was like and I probably never will. That doesn’t mean I can’t help you understand it, help you speak about it. Our sessions can be discussing why you don’t like a certain food or your deepest secrets. Either way, Tommy, I’m here to help. I will not judge you. I will simply listen.”

“And if you can’t help?” He asks, thinking about Purpled’s comments and she smiles.

“Then I’ll help Phil find someone who can.”

If Tommy feels lighter as he walks from the room, well, no one has to know but him.

“Boss,” Cleo says, walking into their conference room, interrupting Ren mid-sentence. “We have a problem.”

Xisuma sighs. “What now?”

Cleo walks over to the laptop, hooked up to the projector showing crime scene photographs of the dead politicians in Russian. Both classed as suicides. Both definitely not suicides.

She types something, clicking open an email and then clicking on the attached files. Photographs fill the projection screen.

It’s a somewhat terrifying sight.

Grian feels the blood rush from his face, wings tightening around himself.

“These are from a source working in the Tolmachevo airport,” Cleo informs.

The Angel of Death, wings out in all their glory, without a mask, standing before at least a hundred children all clothed in combat gear. Around them, adults stand near, also dressed in combat gear but noticeable combat gear.

“Those are Black Widows and Huntsman Spiders,” Xisuma breathes and Iskall twitches, fingers brushing the edge of his bionic eye.

Cleo clicks to another photo and it’s the Angel standing in front of three adults and a boy. A large man with pink hair lingers at his side.

Blood God, Grian’s mind tells him.

“Ah!” Iskall leans forward jabbing his finger at the brunet man. “He’s the one that shot me!”

“What?” Multiple voices chime in.

“That- that one!” Iskall shouts. “We heard rumours about Baba Yaga - the boogieman - that he was lurking in New York. We got so close, thought we had him, but then-“

Iskall chokes on his words, dropping back to his seat. Grian finds himself reaching over, squeezing the man's shoulder.

They've all heard the story. They all remember waiting for seven hours in a hospital waiting room as Iskall underwent surgery to repair his face and body.

When they first heard about the man, their Russian contacts only told them two things: one, he was the Huntsman Spider but they all called him the Baba Yaga; two, he had deadly aim.

They tried to follow him but the leads all disappeared until New York. Iskall was sent in with a team of eleven other people.

Iskall was the only one who survived the explosion and the shooting that followed.

The man once again disappeared.

Based off of other sightings and CCTV footage, Iskall is the only one to have ever tried to attack the man and live. Iskall was more than just lucky.

"Wait," Ren breathes, brown ears flattening on his skull. "Doesn't that mean the Syndicate is now involved with the Red Room? And that the Red Room's agents are Black Widows and Huntsman Spiders?"

"The Syndicate now has access to an army of assassins," Cleo says, quietly and they all pause at that.

"Grian," Xisuma says, when the silence grows too loud. He turns, keeping his hand on Iskall's shoulder. "Any news?"

He shakes his head. "Morningstar is as cryptic as ever. All I could gather was whatever they were in Russia for, that problem has been solved."

"By child assassins," Cleo hisses and Grian's wings flutter.

"Well," he says, hoping to lighten the tension, "he never explicitly mentioned that."

Xisuma rolls his eyes but Ren snorts and Grian grins victoriously, dropping his hand when Iskall finally looks back up.

"I assume you're running it through facial recognition-" Xisuma says but Cleo sighs.

"I don't need to." She states and then points at the Angel. "Philza Minecraft. He runs local businesses in L'Manberg. This one is his son, Technoblade. I assume this one over here in the corner of the frame is his other son, Wilbur. None of that matters when getting close to them will be impossible. They'll shift the kids the minute we're near."

"And that's if they don't kill us on arrival," Iskall breathes and Ren makes a low whining sound.

“No one is dying,” Xisuma says, voice strong and firm and Grian may know he’s being lied to but he does trust his friend, his boss. “Call up the team. We need more information if we’re going to try and take the Syndicate down.”

Grian’s wings tighten at that but he knows this may be the only option if the Angel is going to be taking over from the Red Room.

He simply feels bad for those children, stuck in the middle.

Chapter End Notes

Purpled lore and Tommy getting therapy!!

Also!!!!

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/34561909>

^^ I have written a Squid Game AU if you want to check that out ;)

Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

We see the Syndicate's base!!

TW// mental health discussions, entomophobia (bug phobia) warning, arachnophobia (IF YOU DONT LIKE BUGS SKIP THE FLASHBACK SCENE), violence, past brainwashing, past child abuse, brief mention of child and human trafficking, discussions of dead bodies, blood and injury, weaponry

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After another week of walking around the orphanage, they all come to a mutual decision that it's time for the Syndicate to go back to their base and for the Heroes to return to their tower.

Standing in front of the orphanage, they all end up inadvertently picking sides.

Dream wants to follow Puffy for obvious reasons. George has no desire to leave his side. Sapnap, on the other hand, wants to follow Quackity as Karl is debating taking his leave from Schlatt more seriously. Tommy can't wait to see Chronos as a vigilante.

Jack - now Sean as he says the name fits him better and that having two Jacks is awkward and confusing - wants to become a mercenary for both the Syndicate and Las Nevadas. Corpse, Rae, and Skyunno have sided with Sapnap while Tina and Leslie are heading for the Heroes. Minx is simply following Niki to the Syndicate's ranks. Toast has decided to no longer be involved as a Villain, Vigilante or Hero.

It's an even mix; their powers balancing each other out and Tommy doesn't feel as apprehensive when he leaves behind his brothers to scout out the Syndicate's base.

Tommy simply feels a little lost.

That's all.

Dream has Puffy now, and by extension, Drista and Foolish. George has Dream. Sapnap has Quackity and Karl.

Tommy doesn't have any partners or parents.

Tommy is once again alone and as much as he despises it, solitude is safety.

He returns to his apartment, finds it's exactly the same and spends an hour listening to his record player while gripping Henry to his chest. It's cold and plain and Tommy doesn't know whether he wants to cry or laugh.

He's back to where it all started, several months ago.

Dream mentioned how he's older than they first thought and Tommy remembers the graduation ceremony like it was yesterday but it wasn't. Tommy thinks he's seventeen.

Or maybe he's simply too old for his bones already.

He's lived through hell and survived, yet he's once again alone. His face may mature but he will stop ageing soon, like the other agents. He will forever remain this.

He finds himself outside of the warehouse again. The guards are different and they don't even question him. They simply open one of the red doors.

Inside the warehouse, it's large and boring and mostly empty apart from two sage green couches opposite each other, a glass coffee table between them. Further back, there's an elevator, once again guarded.

Tommy makes eye contact with the cameras sitting in front of it and one of guards twitches before nodding. Someone is clearly in a control room, watching Tommy.

The security guard presses the button for the elevator, swipes a card along the card-swipe in the wall.

The doors open and Tommy steps in, raising his eyebrows at the sight of the retinal scanner and handprint scanner. Tommy also guesses by the sensors lining the top of the elevator that there are some body scanners.

The guard swipes his card again in the elevator and a panel opens up. He tilts his body to hide what numbers he's putting in but Tommy simply shifts his weight silently, stands up on his toes and looks in the reflection of the walls.

Eight, six, five, one, six, one, four, nine.

The guard then steps out and the doors close. Tommy watches the numbers tick down as he goes deeper underground.

It makes something prickle up his spine, hair rising at the back of his neck.

Unease. A healthy dose of fear.

It reminds him of the opening to the halls beneath the Room, where all of the horror was hidden.

Tommy swallows, takes a deep breath as the elevator comes to a halt. It opens up to another hallway and then another guarded door. The two guards look him over but open the door without a single compliant as Tommy spots the hidden camera in the corner.

Behind the reinforced black door, noise immediately hits his ears as he steps through and he's shocked by the sight.

It's very industrial. Thick, black steel rods holding up the roof as the walls are covered in exposed brick.

But it's also oddly bright. Wooden planks are hung from the ceiling, embedded with pendant lights while plants and vines are potted atop them.

It's a lobby. That much is clear by the ash wood front desk, potted plants beside the sides as a few people work back there. In front of the reception desk, sage couches sit in as a waiting area, glass coffee table filled with coasters and a couple of books.

Bookshelves are used to divide the room into sections: another waiting room of black chairs curled close and an area that leads to the bathrooms.

Overall, the space is large and open and bright.

Then Tommy looks down and feels his breath catch. It's glass. The floor is glass and under that glass is an aquarium with a-

Tommy freezes, fingers curling into fists as his eyes widen.

It's an aquarium with a shark in it.

A lone hammerhead shark glides through the water as fish congregate together in the plants and out of the shark's way. It's beautiful - the sand and the curling plants and Tommy can spot a couple of clownfish that make him smile - and he stares for longer than he should.

He realises that the shark keeps circling him but he has faith that the glass will hold.

The hairs at the back of his neck rise and he looks up to see Techno looking between him and the shark.

"I think Anchor likes you," he says and Tommy frowns.

"Anchor?" Tommy replies. "That's a fucking cool name for such a dumb-looking shark."

"I will feed you to him," Techno snorts and Tommy narrows his eyes.

"I fucking dare you to try, Tech, I will end your bloodline."

Techno just laughs. "Sure. Why are you here?"

"Wanted to check out the place, didn't I?" Tommy shrugs. "Your security is shit, by the way. Four guards, easily identifiable cameras, no guards in here? Terrible."

Techno grins at him. "You're going to be eating those words, Tommy. C'mon, I'll give you the tour."

“Where are Phil and Wilbur?” Tommy asks, not putting up a fight when following him out of the lobby.

“A meeting,” Techno replies, shortly.

Down a hallway of exposed brick and black slabs under his shoes, they turn into a hallway which is lined with what look like conference rooms. Tommy remains quiet as he inspects where they walk, taking note of the floor plan.

“You’re quiet,” Techno comments as they approach another large, open room, where one side leads to stairs and the other side has multiple doors.

“New place, innit,” Tommy mutters.

“You’re scouting out the place.” Techno states and Tommy snorts.

“I’m in the base of the most powerful Villains in America, of course I am, man.”

Techno stops in front of a door and frowns at him. “You can leave anytime you want and I can set you up with your biometrics so you can come here when you want.”

Tommy rolls his eyes. “I know and I’d like that, it’s just—“

Tommy finds himself pausing. The Room is difficult to explain on a good day but he can’t quite formulate a response as to why he’s a little on edge.

He’s just lost.

His brothers are away and Tommy knows how to be independent but he’s not used to doing things alone. He’s not used to being allowed to do things, even if he was free before, his stint back in the Room only proved that he’s used to not having opinions.

“Ah,” Techno says at his silence. “You don’t know what to do with yourself now that you’re free.”

“I was free before, bitch,” Tommy snaps back but Techno doesn’t even flinch.

“No, you weren’t. You still had their shadow hanging over you. Now you’re actually free and you have idea what you’re doing.”

“Piss off,” Tommy hisses but Techno still doesn’t flinch. “You have no idea what I’m feeling.”

“No,” Techno agrees easily. “But I was once a scared kid fighting for my life under the control of a man who only saw me as a moneymaker. When I left with Phil, I was still fighting. It wasn’t until I burnt that place to the ground that I was left with a horrifying reality.”

“Which was?” Tommy asks, knowing he’s being led into a trap but willingly walking into it just to learn more about him.

“I could do anything I wanted, go anywhere I wanted. I was in control of me for the first time in my entire life.” Techno shrugs, pushing a pink strand out of his face. “It terrified me.”

Tommy blinks at him. Maybe him and Techno are more alike than he realised.

Sure, he’s noticed the way he fights, the strength and speed, the skill of his weapons. Techno is a fighter but his illegal fights as a child was involuntary. Just like Tommy and being forced to be a child assassin.

He sighs, re-evaluating. The defensiveness bleeds out of him and he slumps.

“What the fuck should I do?”

Techno smiles at him and it’s oddly soft. “Whatever you feel like doing but if you want to destroy some governments, I’m always free for anarchy.”

Tommy laughs and he can’t help but feel himself fully relax. “Okay, big T. I’ll be sure to give you a list of all the governments I want to destabilise.”

Techno snorts. “Good. Now can we get back to the tour?”

Tommy rolls his eyes as Techno points out the conference rooms and the toilets and a kitchen stocked full of coffee and biscuits. He moves on, up the stairs and Tommy follows.

He’s surprised when they come across a swimming pool, a home cinema and a large, open living room and kitchen. It’s the same industrial design but with the warm lights and wooden planks and plants.

“The training rooms are down the opposite hallway, near the control room and Tubbo’s cave.”

Tommy raises his eyebrows. “Tubbo’s cave?”

“It’s where he hacks,” Techno says. “Only Ranboo’s allowed in there unless it’s something important Phil needs to see. He rarely uses it though. We prefer to stay at the house.”

“But you have a mini-house down here.”

Techno snorts. “If you cut through there,” he says, pointing to a door next to the fridge, “we have a few bedrooms.”

“This is so unsafe,” Tommy mutters. “You’re underground and biometrics and reinforced doors can only get you so far.”

“You’re just listening to your birdbrain,” Techno replies with an eye roll. “We have doors that slam shut to hide the stairs if we’re all staying down here. We have guard rotations, who are all checked through Jack and probably Niki, too. As for if we need a getaway? Follow me.”

Techno leads Tommy away from the kitchen, back towards to the stairs but presses at one of the bookshelves lining the walls. It groans as it shifts, pulling backwards revealing another

hallway.

Tommy grins at how the first opening in the hallway is a filled armoury.

At his grin, Techno says, “there’s another near the training rooms.”

Then he walks and Tommy follows. The hallway curves awkwardly, a slow rise and Tommy can feel the change in temperature as it goes from the controlled warmth of the base to an harsh chill.

It isn’t until he hears a rushing sound that his eyes widen. Water. A lot of water.

The Badlands is near the Port.

“Oh, seriously?” Tommy asks and Techno laughs as the continue in moderate darkness to where the hallway breaks off into exposed rock that’s been chipped away to create a tunnel.

The rock opens up and Tommy can feel his breath catch.

The rock opens up to a small cave that’s backed by rushing water. The Syndicate’s exit is a waterfall. Tommy finds himself laughing, completely stunned.

“Fucking hell,” he says, stepping closer to brush his fingers against the water. It’s cold but refreshing.

“We have security cameras and sensors in case someone gets close,” Techno informs. “There are more doors that slam shut at any movement and if you walk along that rock face, it leads to a boat.”

“Ah,” Tommy says. “Smart.”

“Could you get in?” Techno asks and Tommy actually considers the question.

He thinks of this exit and the entrance. The cameras and the reinforced doors. The security guards.

“It depends if I could hack the cameras,” he says. “If I can hack the cameras and loop them so that no one notices, getting through the front entrance would be easy. So long as I can get your biometrics, either through hacking it or finding one of you and using that. I already know the code for the elevator.”

Techno raises his eyebrows. “You do?”

Tommy smiles. “I do.”

“Menace,” Techno grins and then tilts his head at Tommy. “Want to check out the training rooms? We could spar. You look like you want to get out of your head.”

“I’ll fucking destroy you,” Tommy replies with a sweet smile and Techno laughs.

“I’ve learnt from our first meeting, Tommy. You’re not going to win this time.”

As he turns from the hallway, Tommy follows after him, bouncing on his heels. “I think I will, big man.”

Past the secret door - that Techno slides back into place - and down the stairs, they walk along the hallway. Past that hallway, back into the lobby, where Tommy grins at Anchor.

The hammerhead shark swims up to him, tapping the glass with his snout to greet Tommy.

“Hey, buddy.” He says as he walks, away from the reception desks and towards the other hallway.

Techno pushes open a set of double doors and Tommy whistles.

The training room reminds him of the old ones back in the Room. High ceilings, floor covered in crash mats, and a boxing ring in the centre, Tommy has to try remember he’s in the Syndicate’s base, not the Room.

The exposed brick and wooden planks with the lights prove that.

In the corner, near the punching bags slightly hidden by the steel pole holding the ceiling up, Niki stands in workout gear. Her hands are wrapped and one of punching bag swings back towards her. She catches it and smiles at Tommy.

“I thought you went to Techno’s gym?” Tommy asks and she shrugs.

“I don’t have to lie anymore,” she says. “I can punch things here and not have too many questions asked.”

Something about that makes Tommy tilt his head. “Are you thinking about getting back into the game?”

She laughs and it’s an almost dangerous sound. “Who said I left?”

Techno shifts next to Tommy. “You’ve been out on the streets?”

Niki laughs. She steps away from the punching bag and blows her fringe from her eyes.

Tommy watches the way she moves, a predator disguised as a person. All lithe movements and smooth smiles that have Tommy on edge instantly. He knows that look in her eyes, knows the way she moves because he watched the Widows get trained.

Niki grins at him but the minute Techno turns around, her smile is nothing but sweet. Tommy shivers and steps further away.

Techno turns his head to obviously ask Tommy why he’s moving and Niki takes the opening presented to her.

She lunges forward, wrapping an arm around Techno's neck and propelling herself around so that she can swipe the legs out from under him.

Tommy darts away as Techno falls to the crash mats. Niki merely rises from her crouch and grins down at Techno, that wolf smile to her lips.

"Wil mentioned my name once, that the Syndicate was interested in a certain vigilante." Niki says and then looks to Tommy. "That day in my bakery, when you first met Ranboo and Tubbo."

Techno groans in the ground, pink hair spread behind his head. "You're Nemesis," Techno breathes and she nods.

"I get revenge for those who can't."

"You go after domestic abusers, right?" Techno asks, slowly standing, cracking his neck.

She nods, a fire burning in her eyes. "I sit in on the meetings and ask if they want something done about it. Most of the time, I don't kill them, I just strip them of their finances but sometimes... sometimes a more violent approach is needed."

"Niki," Tommy says with wide eyes. "You're so fucking cool."

"Thank you," she says with a sweet laugh. Something then shifts in her experience. "You came here to spar, Tommy, right?"

He laughs, nervously. "I'd rather fight Techno and not break a bone, Niki."

"I do have some restraint," she grins and Tommy finds himself grinning back.

There is an itch under his skin and he knows that out of any of the people Tommy wants to fight, going against a fellow agent will limit any possible accidental deaths.

Tommy shifts his weight and she immediately mirrors him. Techno, learning quick, steps back.

"Performance rules," Niki says and Tommy nods.

"Uh," Techno says. "What are performance rules?"

"Sometimes we were used as entertainment," Niki replies, as Tommy and her begin to slowly circle one another. "Normally, it would be Handler rules: everything goes. But some guests were sensitive or important so we couldn't actually injure each other too severely."

"You could with Handler rules?" Techno asks and his voice is bleeding concern and anger.

"Yep," Tommy says, sees his opening. "Handler rules only had one exception--"

"No killing," Tommy and Niki say in unison.

“Training rules were everything goes,” Tommy carries on. “Those meant you could kill each other.”

Without another word, he throws himself forward.

A punch, a kick. Niki easily deflects, dropping under his kick to swipe the legs out from under him. He jumps, spins to kick her. Her head snaps to the side to avoid it and a hand latches out, grabbing his ankle and tugging.

Tommy falls but rolls to stop an elbow to the stomach, flipping up only to come face to face with her again. A laugh leaves his lip and she grins.

“Getting too old?” He asks and she rolls her eyes.

“Oh, little bird, I’m only getting started.”

The name briefly catches him off guard so she has time to slam her shin into his side. He lurches, catches her punch and pulls her over his shoulder.

She drops but kicks a leg into his ankle so that he has to roll to make sure he doesn’t fall. They both fall back into the same position, aiming quick punches that never land.

He feels warmed up now, cracks his neck and rolls his shoulders. She smirks and then darts forward.

He catches the knee to his stomach, snaps a leg out that she blocks from hitting her side. He tries again only for her to spin, kicking him in the chest.

Stumbling back, she throws herself at him. Hands lock on his shoulders as she swings her body around, thighs locking around his neck, flipping him onto his back.

The wind rushes from his lungs but something burns inside of him as he ends up vulnerable. His blood calls for a fight, calls for him to survive.

Instead of panicking, a flip switches in his head: the Huntsman makes an appearance.

He also notices that more people begin to walk into the room. It’s no longer just them but his instincts don’t call out for him to be worried.

There’s only one fight that matters.

Niki lands beside him and he grabs at her ankle, tugs as he lifts a leg to knee her in the side. Flipping up in sync, she punches at him, but he deflects, punching her cheek.

She doesn’t even flinch, lifts a leg to kick but he blocks it, sending out his own kick that lands. She stumbles back and he advances, a shark scenting blood.

She punches again and this time, he ducks under the move, hands gripping her arm, rolling as she’s forced to flip so her arm doesn’t break. On the ground, he tries to elbow her in the chest but her legs curl up, a foot smashes into his knee.

Pain bursts in his knee as he's forced back, both now panting slightly.

Tommy takes in the faces of Tubbo and Ranboo, Phil and Wilbur behind them. He makes eye contact with Jack as Niki and Tommy continue to circle one another and more people he doesn't know stand and watch.

"Still good?" Niki asks in Russian, bruise forming on her cheek and he grins.

"You know the rules," he replies, shaking his leg out. "Tap out or fight it out."

Niki doesn't wait to lunge forward and their dangerous dance begins again. A punch and a kick. A jab and a dodge. It becomes what the rules explain: a performance.

Their movements are fluid as they learn the other's fighting style. Niki's is a quick jab and a retreat, all feints until a finishing move.

Tommy finds as he ends up once again with a fist inches from his face that he enjoys this. It's no pressure, no worry.

It's relaxing.

They both know they're leaving openings for possible kill shots. At any time, Tommy could lunge for her throat, or she could use her siren voice to stun him.

Tommy has outlasted Dream, he knows that he could grab her, smash her head into the ground. Niki is a Black Widow, if she wanted Tommy dead, she could quite easily snap his neck.

But this is just a friendly game.

Tommy throws himself at her: an arm around the back of the neck, body horizontal so he can twist her to fall forward. She goes down and as he goes to punch her, she ducks under the fist, climbing onto his back, arm locked around his throat.

He chokes, jabs an elbow into her ribs but she doesn't even flinch. He tries to keep his breathing as even as possible as he leans back and then tucks forward, throwing her from his back.

In seconds, they're both up again, arms blocking their faces, hands in fists, facing one another.

"Phil," Techno says, breaking their focus and Tommy notices that most of the people are now leaving. "How am I suppose to compare to this?"

"You need more hours in the gym, Tech," Wilbur says before Phil can even open his mouth. "All those muscles and you were beaten by a child."

Tommy narrows his eyes playfully at Wilbur. "If you want to try, Wil-"

"No, no, no," Wilbur says, shaking his head, hands up in a surrender. "I'm just the advisor."

“Have you thought about teaching?” Phil asks, and both Niki and Tommy tense.

All relaxation is gone from his body as he’s suddenly thrust back there, standing in a training room, watching as the younger recruits follow the same instructions he was given years ago.

“No,” Tommy chokes out, shaking his head, finding the room too small, too suffocating. “No, I- no-“

“Okay,” Phil says, calmly even as his feathers flare in panic. “Okay. No teaching. That’s alright. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, mate.”

“You could use it, though,” Niki says and Tommy simply closes his eyes, takes a deep breathe to calm the beating of his heart. “It’s just that- well, it’s not really feasible.”

“Can you explain why?” Wilbur asks, quietly and Tommy opens his eyes, meets Niki’s inquisitive glance.

“We were sometimes forced to train the recruits,” Tommy says, in a hushed tone. He does not meet their eyes: he doesn’t want to see their anger or pity. “I mostly watched because I was younger.”

“And the teaching methods were... less to be desired,” Niki adds. “You get the question wrong-“

“A slap.” Tommy finishes for her with a shrug. “Or a punch. Sometimes it’s a couple of days in the isolation chamber if you’ve been really stupid.”

“They made you hurt the other kids if they-“ Phil chokes on his words and Tommy finally looks up, sees the anger and disgust and pain.

“We were able to kill each other,” Tommy reminds him, bluntly. “Slapping a little kid really didn’t phase you if you’ve been in their position or if you know your punishment if you don’t follow through.”

Techno’s eyes are flashing red and Wilbur is shaking slightly and Phil’s wings are curled tightly around him. Both Niki and Tommy remain tense but still.

“I’m going to revive that guy and kill him again,” Techno spits and Tommy rolls his eyes.

“I’ll join,” Jack agrees.

”Nukes?” Tubbo asks and Ranboo sighs loudly.

“That doesn’t stop what happened to us and anyway, there are other organisations linked to the Room if you want to go on a killing spree.” Tommy says, massaging his knee. Niki’s bruise on her cheek is already healing.

Wilbur freezes, tilts his head. “There are?”

Tommy once again rolls his eyes. “Where do you think the rest of the agents are? Sean is trying to work out where their bases are.”

Techno exhales, shares a look with Wilbur. “And where would Sean be?”

“Probably Las Nevadas because Corpse knew the most out of all of us if Toast can’t be found.”

Before Techno can even open his mouth, Wilbur is nodding. “Let’s go.”

Tommy doesn’t follow, just watches as Jack pulls Tubbo into a one-armed hug, pulling him from the room with Ranboo awkwardly lurking behind them.

The energy is drained from him as Niki looks to Phil and says, “I don’t mind teaching but I need someone to watch over me. Just in case I step out of line without realising.”

“Of course,” Phil says, voice soft. “Anything you need. Thank you.”

Tommy briefly thinks about it as the itch under his skin returns. Maybe it’s a Life thing: the need to be moving, to be doing something.

“I’ll sit in, if you don’t mind,” he says and gets two gentle smiles.

“Of course, Toms.” Phil says and slowly reaches out a hand to ruffle his hair. He allows it, leaning into it.

Later, he will go and find Tubbo and Ranboo. He’ll sit in as they talk, letting the noise wash over him as he settles back into his skin. He needs people, he realises. He needs them like he needs oxygen.

Maybe he needs to let them in.

Maybe he’s just lost and a little scared of what that means.

As for now, he leans into the hand and sighs.

Nine is young and small but he is strong. The others fear him because he has power behind his punches and a dangerous smirk.

He may be good but he is not the best. He is cocky and he makes a potentially fatal mistake.

Nine hates bugs. His manifestation means that when a bug wanders too close, he can burn it off before he can panic.

But the Room has eyes everywhere: watching, waiting.

He is removed from a Spanish class, led between guards out of the doors and into the courtyard, further out into the trees.

There is, what looks like, a grave dug out for him. His stomach drops but his Handler just rolls his eyes.

“Five hours,” he says, nodding to the pit. “If you scream or try to escape or use your powers, this will be the sight of your grave.”

Nine drops in, lies down, confused.

He stops being confused when they start dropping bugs on him. Cockroaches and spiders and beetles.

How can he scream when the panic sets in, leaving him choking as he struggles to breathe? He shudders and shakes and locks his muscles, closes his eyes and tries to calm his racing heart.

When Nine crawls out, he is more spider than person. He is Sapnap and when, a week later, they put him back, he removes his mind from his body and drifts.

(George tells him he was once scared of the dark.)

(Dream tells him he was once scared of small spaces.)

Sapnap, like the others, learns that fear is a weakness and the Room does not tolerate weakness.

He's not really sure how he goes from standing in the Syndicate's lounge with Tubbo and Ranboo, to following Phil in the shadows but here he is. Tommy really needs to start getting paid for this.

Maybe he heard the word Sharp and remembered the name. Maybe he doesn't want anything to happen to Phil. Maybe he's just wants the itch under his skin to stop.

Either way, Tommy is in his Huntsman gear, wings tucked into his skin and he's not letting anything happen to Phil or Techno. Even if they're immortals, if Tommy can kill Wilbur, someone else might be able to.

They're in the industrial park of the Badlands, between containers and port equipment and in the dying light, Tommy can see the telltale sign of shifting atop scaffolding. Snipers.

Tommy slinks in the darkness of the shadows. Phil and Techno either haven't noticed or don't care about the snipers but Tommy sure as hell does.

Even if they can come back to life, a head wound is a worrying thing.

Tommy climbs silently up the scaffolding of the sniper on the right. He can't kill him - he doesn't know how Phil would react and his past Handlers (even if Phil isn't his Handler) used to hate it if he killed without permission.

Crouching low, Tommy creeps closer and then snaps his leg out. The sniper is laying on their front so Tommy's boot connects with the sniper's cheek. He then darts forward, garrotte slipping around the sniper's neck as his knees dig into their spine. He tightens it, stopping any sound apart from the low gurgle as breath is stolen from them.

Tommy counts - anything over thirty seconds will kill - and waits for the body to slump before he ejects the clip from the rifle. Then he pats the body down, finds another clip and then silently drops to the ground, moving to the next sniper.

He grabs at the steel poles and pulls himself up, all light and quick. Like the spider he is.

Dropping through the poles, he can see the tension in the other sniper and knows that something has alerted the sniper. He's extra cautious, keeping low and hooks a finger into his utility belt, grabbing a disk from a pouch there.

It's better to not risk detection.

Pressing the centre, he activates the disk and throws it. It lands on the sniper and they jerk as electricity courses through them.

Tommy runs forward, grabs the side of their head and smashes it into the metal pole. The sniper falls limp. Tommy collects the clip and backup and then slips back to the ground, discarding the bullets in a corner as notices a car pull up.

Sleek black - so much like the Room it makes his breath catch and bile rise in his throat - and quiet, the door swings open and Sharp steps out, a bodyguard next to him.

Tommy waits until the car turns off and locks before he uses the darkness to get close and pulls out a tracking chip, lodging it under the car.

Even if Phil wants to make a connection with Sharp, Tommy doesn't intend for him to get far. He knows Sapnap's past with him and the tension the Widow's had.

"Angel," Sharp greets, Russian accent not disguised.

"Sharp," Phil replies, mask on his face and wings curled tight to his back, arched high. "You wanted to speak with me?"

"There are rumours about you wishing to speak to an official of the Russian government," Sharp says and then throws his arms wide. "Here I am."

"No need, mate," Phil says, calmly. "I've sorted everything out now. You're a couple of weeks too late."

Sharp isn't deterred and Tommy's hand grips the gun in his holster. "Ah, but I'm here now. Let's talk about... hmm, what about that boy you're trying to find documents for? I'm sure I could look into it."

Both Phil and Techno tense and Tommy finds himself glaring at Sharp.

Ranboo got out. Ranboo has been free from the Room's clutches for years and Tommy is never going to make him experience the hell he did.

"I have that covered, too," Phil says, firmly, head tilting behind his plague mask. "This has been lovely but I--"

"No, no, no," Sharp grins and Tommy edges closer, tugging the gun from his holster. "We have so much to discuss. I don't suppose you know about the Red Room?"

Tommy's blood cools and he flicks the safety off his gun.

Phil's feathers don't even twitch. "Red Room? That sounds a little creepy, mate. Never heard of it."

"Hmm," Sharp grins and he fixes the cuffs on his suit sleeves. Something stirs in Tommy and he realises it's a subtle cue for the snipers that are unconscious. "See, I find that funny. You and your Syndicate show up in the embassy only for days later, you're seen boarding a plane with a hundred children. That's a little suspicious, isn't it?"

Phil shakes his head, feathers puffing up. "I don't know what you mean--"

Sharp taps his foot but nothing happens. Sharp straightens immediately and Tommy knows, just knows, that was a sign of some kind.

"You're not alone," Sharp accuses and Tommy's moving before the bodyguard can even get his gun out of his shoulder holster.

Tommy presses the gun to the back of Sharp's neck and cocks the hammer. The bodyguard freezes as does Sharp and something dark twists in Tommy, something smug.

"Your move, bitch," Tommy mutters in Russian and Sharp tilts his head to look in his peripherals.

"Ah, a Huntsman," Sharp whispers in Russian, focuses his gaze on Phil and says in English, "you have a Huntsman working for you? How much did that cost? I'd be sure to double it."

Tommy swallows as Phil's wings curl tighter and Techno's hand tightens on the pommel of his sword.

"He's not for sale," Phil spits but Tommy's heart still thunders in his chest.

Compared to the others, he was rarely loaned out to other organisations. Some needed a small child, and little boys with big blue eyes and blond hair were helpful on many missions but he rarely did those alone.

It was only when he was older, approaching graduation, that the loaning became more frequent.

Even then, Eret didn't sanction many excursions for Tommy when his powers were discovered. He was too much of a prize to be lost.

But the same doesn't apply to his brothers. George and the woman with the red painted nails. Dream and never discussing his time in Europe. Sarnap and fighting back at any chance.

Tommy, thankfully, never experienced the full extent of what it was like to be a Huntsman.

But he knows enough. He knows that saying no or refusing was never an option. He knows that George hates when someone grabs his face and that Dream had bruises all around his neck that took too long to heal and Sarnap only ever welcomed the chair when he came back.

"Shame," Sharp mutters. "I think I shall take this as my cue to leave, yes?"

Phil nods. "I think so, too, mate."

Tommy steps aside, hidden back into the shadows, as Sharp walks to his car with his bodyguard. They don't wait for the snipers.

"Tommy?" Phil asks as the car drives away and Tommy pulls out the phone Wilbur gave him from his inside pocket to tell Sarnap. He wishes him a happy hunting.

"Sharp was a guy some of us were loaned out to," Tommy informs him. "It's been on the news, everything about the Room. People are coming out of the woodwork."

"No one is ever hurting you again," Techno swears but Tommy can't help but feel doubt flood his veins.

Techno can't promise that.

Even if Tommy hopes they'll be okay.

"There will be more," he warns, looking at them. "Especially if they know about the kids. Some other governments might even involve themselves."

"If they do come," Phil says, voice firm. "We'll stop them before anything happens. I promised those children that they would be safe."

"Sharp had snipers," Tommy says. "The others might not leave so calmly."

"We will cross that bridge when we get to it," Phil replies, reaching for him and Tommy tumbles into his arms. Phil squeezes him as Techno rests his hand on Tommy's shoulder.

"How about some of Fundy's ice cream?" Techno asks and Tommy snorts.

He knows this won't be the last time someone tries to find out about the Room. His past is filled with fractured memories and hundreds of faces of Handlers and guards and people they were loaned to.

But for now, he lets it go. Michelle has told him that some fights don't need to be fought. Some memories, some of his past, needs to remain in the past.

“Okay,” he says and prays that when more of their collective past makes a reappearance, it won’t end in bloodshed and death.

He has been a morgue assistant for a very long time. He’s seen death in almost every different way and he knows he’s become indifferent to it.

The smell, the look, the overall aura of being in contact with a body that is nothing but a shell.

The soul is gone.

He’s also aware of the facility just out of town, behind the thicket of trees, stranded in open snow. He’s seen a few of them - always polite and calm, too cold in their eyes, like the corpses he deals with - but they never stay long.

They mostly need a body or need to get rid of one. He helps because he has no choice and he has a wife and daughter at home waiting for him. It is not any of his business.

He deals with the dead. He does not wish to end up on his own table, stone cold and heart still.

So he is surprised when an American calls him to go and receive a body out there. He knows the facility like to deal with their dead in their own way. He does not dare interfere.

But the American wants him to go and Alexander does not disagree. Maybe his curiosity will kill him some day. He heads out, into the ice and finds the facility as destroyed as it was months ago and no body.

The graves are still standing - one is disturbed, a blackberry bush half-destroyed and curling over a headstone, red vines poking out from the frozen soil - but if he stares hard enough, he can see footsteps in the snow. Two sets.

He arrives back and tells the American that the wolves got there quicker than he did.

The American cries and Alexander sits through it until the call disconnects.

He tries to forget the footprints and the red vines and the destroyed building he witnessed. It is not for his eyes to see. Not when he has a wife and daughter who need him to return home.

Alexander goes back to work and pretends, like the rest of Russia, like the rest of the world that knows, that Black Widows and Huntsman Spiders are but arachnids.

Nothing more.

Hmmmmmmm foreshadowing ;)

Hmmmmmmm their past is making a reappearance:)

Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

Healing <3

TW// mental health discussions, mention of forced sterilisation and forced coupling, past child abuse, weaponry, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sharp is dead before sunrise.

Toast, despite no longer wishing to be a part of the crime life, informs Sykunno that the four politicians in the news for committing suicide was his handiwork.

Corpse has a hand in another two and a few other high-ranking officials but even Corpse doesn't have access to every bad person from their past.

Other than that, the agents have started to drift apart.

Dream and George are with the Heroes and Sapnap is with his fiancé's-

("I've been rejected twenty-seven times." Wilbur states, fiddling with the jester's mask in his hands, waiting for a client in Las Nevadas. Quackity lurks at his side, eager to catch a glimpse of the person Wilbur is waiting for.

But as he says it, Quackity can't help but throw his head back and laugh. Sapnap snorts while Karl giggles, holding hands even as Karl has his head resting on Sapnap's shoulder.

He said it was for warmth. No one called out his lie.

"Those twenty-seven people have no taste," Quackity replies with a wink and Wilbur simply turns his head, makes direct eye contact with Quackity.

"Quackity, I want to have sex with you."

"Fuck no." Sapnap hisses as Karl nearly falls over from laughing. Quackity's face burns red at the intense stare before he clocks what Sapnap said.

"Hey!" Quackity says to Sapnap, snapping his head around. "You called him hot!"

"No, I- when?" Sapnap asks back, eyebrows raised as Karl wheezes behind him.

“Tommy told me!” Quackity accuses, finger pointing at him. “Dream said his height was attractive and George was worried he was losing his pretty privilege!”

Wilbur stutters through an incoherent response, eyes wide and face bright red. “W-what?”

“Tommy was lying!” Sappnap hisses back and Karl leans against the wall, clutching his stomach.

“Oh my god,” he breathes, tears in his eyes. “I love Tommy so much, this is too good.”

They both turn to Karl and Wilbur uses this as an opportunity to pull in his dignity, stand straighter and, despite the red to his cheeks, plaster a smirk to his lips. “So,” he says, gaining their attention. “Who am I having sex with considering I’m supposedly extremely attractive?”

Quackity blushes while Sappnap immediately pushes Wilbur away, spitting curses and reminders that Tommy is a lying liar who lies. Karl, in the meantime, ends up in the floor, giggling until he can barely breathe.

He makes a mental note to get Tommy anything he wants for Christmas.)

-which leaves Tommy with a lot of time on his hands. So he may spend a lot of time at the Syndicate’s base but there is one thing that draws the agents together.

Sitting in Niki’s bakery - Tommy making his way through a handful of delights he’s missed while in the Room - they try and coordinate where the rest of the organisation is.

After all, the Red Room was only one branch of Department X.

But all of their memories are flawed.

“Well,” Sean says, picking at his nails with a dagger, not meeting their eyes. “About the whole memory thing-“

“You remember, don’t you?” Rae hisses and Sean shrugs.

“I do heal very quickly,” he replies in an even tone. “They had to fry me to get the chair to work.”

“You know where they are?” Corpse asks, just as even and Jack finally looks up.

“Unlike you, I wasn’t the most complicit,” Sean breathes with a slight smirk to his lips. “Or the most relaxed. The only person I was loaned out to was the Beast himself.”

Tommy pauses at that. He’s heard the name but never met the organisation before. He was too special to be thrown into their challenges but he had heard the woman discuss his blood.

He might’ve been used in one of their experiments.

“I remember when you came back,” Corpse says, eyebrows raised. “You normally gloat but you were so fucking quiet.”

Sean sniffs. “Maybe I didn’t want to discuss my mental breakdown after- after they made me kill someone I considered a friend, Corpse-y poo.”

It’s on the edge of being serious, of being angry and so they all lean back, giving Sean a moment of quiet. It’s rare to see him like this - he’s crazy but he’s kind, even to the recruits when he would hand out fake punishments - and so they wait for him to settle back into his skin.

“Where?” Niki asks when he’s back to bobbing his knee and there’s something dark in her eyes.

“Old weapons factory, outside of Moscow,” Sean says. “I was in the trunk at the time so I can’t tell you where but I could probably show you the way.”

Corpse grins at Rae and Niki sighs. “I remember that look,” Niki says. “That means mayhem.”

“You mean you don’t want to destroy Mr Beast’s experimentation lab?” Rae replies, darkness flooding her eyes and Niki just grins.

“Oh, absolutely but we could have a bit of dignity about it.”

“Tubbo’s nukes?” Tommy asks and she laughs.

“That would be funny. But no.”

Tommy frowns at her. “That’s mean.”

She rolls her eyes. “We should hit them when the watchers are there. That’ll cause the most disruption.”

Corpse grins and Rae and Sean immediately lean forward. Tommy tilts his head, trying to remember what that means. It takes a second for him to realise she means the Final Games.

Every year, on the thirteenth of February, Mr Beast holds what he dubs the Final Games. The contestants are agents, or his own experiments, who compete in a series of games to find an ultimate winner.

Bets are placed and the entire ordeal is broadcast to paying customers, some being the Handlers of the agents playing.

Sean won three years in a row.

An experiment simply known as Dark won before promptly disappearing.

“Good plan,” Corpse praises but Sean looks more than a little impatient.

“Why can’t we hit now? I’m bored!”

“Unlike you,” Rae says, “we’re not immortals. A bullet to our head will kill us.”

Sean just stares at her. “Such a shame.”

Rae lunges and Tommy dodges away as they end up sending half-hearted punches to each other.

“The thirteenth,” Corpse says and smiles. “He used to say it was his lucky number.”

Niki grins back. “I can’t wait to make it unlucky.”

Tommy rolls his eyes but he knows each of them have a part of their past they wish to burn.

He’s already killed the woman. He’s complete.

Corpse’s phone buzzes and he blinks down at it before laughing. “Phil’s setting up the obstacle course. Ethan wants a rematch.”

Which finds them an hour later, standing outside of the orphanage, taking note of the course before them. Tina and Minx have already tried it to prove to the children that this isn’t a test, just a healthy competition.

Even if Minx races around shouting with joy at her win.

Tommy watches George and Dream step up beside one another. Dream is grinning, but they both have the Huntsman posture, their eyes intense as they scan the obstacles, prepared to be quick and efficient.

Tommy only looks away when he finds Ranboo holding a boy to his hip, Tubbo talking to the child.

They’ve been trying to deprogramme each other without the help of outside forces. They know each other’s triggers and so they hole up in a room, guarded by other agents and say the triggers until they can snap out of them.

Ponk and Puffy are normally on standby and progress has been made even if it’s slow.

He walks over, studying the boy, watching the way he tilts his head, one eye cloudier than the other, focused on Tubbo’s lips.

Tommy immediately signs to him in ASL and the boy freezes, eyes widening.

“No,” he says, accent lingering in Russian. “I’m not.”

“What?” Tubbo asks but Tommy suddenly realises what he’s done.

In the Room, any possible weakness in someone would have them immediately kicked from the program. Just like the boy with the peanut allergy in Tommy’s class.

They rarely slipped through the cracks and even if they did, they would be found out soon enough. They would be killed very quickly.

Yet this boy has lived, surviving the almost impossible.

Carefully, he smiles a small smile and says, calmly in Russian, “we could get you hearing aids if you need them.”

“I don’t,” he hisses and Tommy holds his hands up in a surrender.

“Okay,” he agrees, easily, switching back to English. “Just something to think about if it gets worse. What’s your name?”

The boy blinks - he’s probably still in the number phase - and Tubbo is the one to say, “what about Michael?”

The boy shrugs, clinging to Ranboo like he’s afraid if he lets go for a second, he’ll be killed. “Okay.”

“Hi, Michael,” Tommy says and looks to Tubbo. “Can you explain why you two seem to be co-parenting this kid?”

“Ranboo and I are married-“

“We are?” Ranboo speaks for the first time and Michael, now the attention is away from him, drops his head to Ranboo’s shoulder.

“- so the next possible step is obviously kids,” Tubbo finishes, ignoring Ranboo.

“You can’t adopt every fucking child assassin, Tubbo,” Tommy says with a laugh but Tubbo crosses his arms over his chest, wings fluttering defiantly.

“Watch me.”

Tommy stares him down and sighs. He looks around, searching for the boy with black hair and spider’s eyes. He spots him, lingering by the door to the orphanage, talking to an identical replica of himself.

Hive was the clone’s name according to Corpse.

“Shroud!” He calls and the boy looks up, tilting his head at Tommy. “Come here!”

The boy pauses before shoving his hands in his jean pockets and walking over, his clone following dutifully behind him.

“Tubbo, Ranboo, Michael,” Tommy says when the boy stands a metre away. “This is Shroud and his... friend.”

Shroud nods, more focused on Ranboo and Michael. Tubbo has been dismissed as a possible threat in his eyes but Ranboo did get out of the Room and Michael is a recruit.

A dark emotion passes over his eyes and he quietly asks Michael in Russian, “do I need to get Corpse?”

It makes Tommy snort when Michael shakes his head. "I like them," he replies in Russian. "They're kind to me."

Shroud seems suspicious of this, his clone edging closer but Michael makes no move to fight the hold Ranboo has on him.

"Tommy?" Tubbo asks and Tommy just smiles at him, reaching over to pat Shroud's shoulder, letting the boy clock the movement so that he doesn't flinch.

"He was just checking in." He informs. "Plus he needs friends."

"I will stab you," Shroud says and Tommy simply stares at him.

"I will stab you right back. I know you have-" Tommy gestures to the clone, "-but you need a real person."

"He's a kid."

"We all are," Tommy reminds him. Shroud doesn't look away so Tommy sighs. "Just think about it yeah?"

A hush makes them all turn around to see Dream and George ready themselves for the course.

Tommy shifts as Rae counts down. Both Dream and George relax their bodies, faces fading into that blankness, eyes turning calculating. Both look like panthers ready to pounce.

Even if this won't end in a possible death, Dream is competitive and George doesn't like losing.

"Go," Rae says and they immediately race forward.

Up a vertical ladder and dropping down into sand. A double beam where they have to drop a foot to the ground between the beams. Crawling beneath a blanket of netted rope. Over ten stepping stones. Over a beam, under a beam. Over and under again.

Dream's ever so slightly ahead but Tommy knows the look in George's eyes. George doesn't go down easily and if Sapnap's smug grin to Quackity's eager shouting to Dream is anything to go by, Sapnap knows George as well as Tommy does.

Across a balancing beam. Up a set of four beams rising in height before dropping down. Up and over a wall. Up another vertical ladder, down into a sand pit.

They land in the sand at almost the same time and George uses this time to strike.

He stumbles, causing Dream to pause for half-a-second to make sure he's alright. George sends a handful of sand right at Dream's face and then swipes his legs out from under him.

Dream crashes down and George immediately runs.

Over a zig-zag balancing beam. Through a chicane. Up and over three more beams.

Dream crosses the finish line three seconds after George.

Sapnap holds out his hand. Quackity sighs, clearly spitting acid in Spanish as he hands over ten dollars. Karl drapes himself across Sapnap's shoulders, grinning.

Tommy tilts his head to find Phil watching them wide-eyed. His wings are hidden today and he's wearing an expensive suit. Behind him, Wilbur and Techno are dressed the same.

"You can do that?" Phil asks and Tommy nods, gestures to Shroud and the rest of the agents and children.

"We all can." He sends a quick glance to Michael. "Well, everyone over... ten, maybe? I assume Niki helped design it? The course back at the Room was a lot worse than this."

"How?" Techno asks and Tommy points to the ladders.

"For starters, those would've been so fucking high. If you fell, or didn't land right, your ankles and legs would be fucked. We also had to climb rope and full-on fighting was allowed. Sometimes powers if the Handlers were bored."

Wilbur reaches for Tommy and he lets himself lean back into his chest. Shroud watches them suspiciously, but there's a longing there.

There will be a time in the future when Shroud, like the other children, will realise there are people who are kind, and good, and not cruel or vicious.

Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But one day.

Tommy himself doesn't fully trust the situation. It's difficult to be so open, so vulnerable. Yet no one is disgusted or flighty around Punz and Purpled and his therapist, Michelle, has been more than helpful.

It's a slow process but Tommy has been trained to be patient.

He wants to make this work.

Corpse and Ethan step up to the obstacle course. Mark has wormed his way close to Sean. They talk like they're old friends.

Puffy stands with Drista and Foolish, all laughing at Dream as he shakes out the sand from his hair.

As he rests in Wilbur's arms, Tubbo and Ranboo step closer, Tubbo's fingers interlocking with Tommy's. He squeezes. Tommy looks over and smiles, squeezes back.

Dream has been graduated for a few years when he learns about the super-soldier program.

If their bloodline is strong and their powers are stronger, they are not sterilised. They are instead used to breed the next generation.

Dream is not allowed to see his file - not after those days when he was a recruit - but he knows he wasn't born and bred here. He does wonder though, as he struggles with an agent fighting for a baby in a Widow's arms, whether any of the others were born and bred here.

He doesn't think Sapnap was: his fire is too strong and he's not compliant. George maybe. He's quiet and cold and efficient.

Dream ends up holding the Huntsman down, letting a nurse stab him in the neck to sedate him before he's dragged away. The Widow with the baby also walk away leaving Dream alone in the maternity ward.

Dream's always been too curious for his own good.

He heads over to the filing cabinet, easily picks the lock and starts to rifle through the documents.

He finds numbers but no names.

Until he gets to the bottom drawer.

He remembers the faces of two of the boys before him. One of the boys is linked with an older Widow but he's long dead. They're all linked with the original Spiders and Widows-

A sound has him spinning, only to be face to face with his Handler rounding the corner, raising his eyebrows at the file in Dream's hand.

"You're smart, Dream," he says and Dream puts it away, shuts the drawer, faces him with shoulders back and head held high. "Too smart. C'mon."

In two hours when Dream leaves the chair on shaky legs, he doesn't remember why he was there in the first place.

Tommy takes them to his apartment when they've been out for a month.

It's not like he's hiding it. It's more the fact that he sleeps either at the Syndicate's base (he's found a hidden corner, and wedges himself there, a gun in his hand as he sleeps) or wherever one of his brothers have found a place to sleep.

Dream has a space in the Heroes Tower. Sapnap has one in Las Nevadas. George flits between the two.

(Tommy wakes to find himself curled against George, the low sound of Sapnap playing a video game in the background.

Dream walks in and wedges himself between George and Sapnap, muttering as he does, “left corner.”

Sapnap hums and then cheers, quietly. “Thanks, man.”

“Go back to sleep,” Dream says to Tommy, reaching over George to ruffle his hair and Tommy shuts his eyes to the sound of even breathing and Sapnap winning his game.)

Tommy thinks he should sell his apartment.

There’s no reason to stay, not when Quackity is offering a room and Phil is offering a room and Tubbo and Ranboo are offering-

But as he stands here, he finds himself unable to let it go. Just like one of their safe houses.

“You haven’t even painted?” George asks and Tommy rolls his eyes.

“Fuck off,” he mumbles, walking over to Henry. He picks the cow up and holds him. Something settles in his chest.

“Cool cow,” Sapnap says, calmly. There is no judgement behind his eyes. “Does it have a name?”

“Henry,” Tommy says and Sapnap smiles at him.

“Hi, Henry,” he says, reaching over to shake a hoof. Tommy laughs and Sapnap’s smile widens.

“This is where you’re staying?” Dream asks, touching the record player.

“Yeah,” Tommy replies. “That’s the first thing I bought when I was free.”

Dream laughs. “C’mon. Music discs?”

“ABBA is legendary and if you insult it, I will go and tell Captain Pussy that you made me cry,” Tommy replies with a grin and Dream rolls his eyes.

“Stop calling my mom Captain Pussy-“

“You said it! Ha! She’s hearing about this, fucker.”

“You’re so feral,” George sighs, crossing his arms over his chest. “Why are we here again? I want to sleep and no offence, Tommy, but this place need some colour. Maybe invest in good curtains?”

“Is this Gogy’s interior designer arc?” Sapnap asks.

“Sap, I will tell your fiancés’ about Brighton.”

Sapnap slowly turns, eyes narrowing. “You so much as mutter a single word and I’ll tell-“

George lunges forward to stop the rest of his sentence. They stare at one another for a few seconds before they both nod. A strange understanding shared between them.

Tommy sits atop his bed and stares at them. “Okay, so ignoring whatever the fuck that was about,” Tommy says, waving his hand. “How are you all?”

Dream scoffs. “What?”

Tommy sighs, digging his fingers into soft fur. “Therapy, bitches. Michelle and I have been talking and she suggested being more open. So we’re going to talk about our feelings.”

“Ah,” George says, leaning back. “Like how you talk to Wilbur about killing him?”

Tommy narrows his eyes. “We did talk, dickhead. When we were both between life and death. So maybe we’re a bit shit at communicating but at least I’m actually talking to a therapist.”

They all shift where they stand. Tommy takes a deep breath.

“Look,” he says, evenly. “George has Dream and Dream has his family and Sap has his fiancé’s but we’re all split up. Especially when everyone is gearing up to start killing individual people and groups associated with the Room. I just wanted to make sure you’re all cool. Sorry for fucking caring.”

Sapnap reaches for him, a hand in his hair. “Hey,” he breathes. “We’re good. It’s a lot but we’re all doing okay.”

“You seem to be- I don’t know, you just aren’t around a lot, I guess.” Tommy mutters, staring at Henry.

“That’s because we want you to have your family,” George says and Tommy snaps his head up, confused and bewildered.

“What?”

George rolls his eyes. “Tommy,” he says, slowly like Tommy is a toddler. “We have all of that but you have Phil and his family.”

“And Quackity’s willing to adopt you,” Sapnap says.

Dream snorts. “That’s if Sam can’t get there first. If Phil is putting his name in, so is he.”

Tommy blinks, swallows. “Trigger wants- Trigger wants to adopt me?”

“If he can beat Phil,” Dream agrees.

“And Quackity,” Sapnap adds.

Tommy stills atop his bed, hands gripping Henry so tightly he’s worried he might start pulling stitches, even as Sapnap continues to ruffle his hair.

They want him. They actually want him.

Tommy was trained to be independent, to be the lone wolf able to topple governments and destroy armies by himself.

Twenty eight to one.

Yet Ranboo is alive and the Room is gone and the recruits and agents are free and Tommy no longer needs to fight for survival.

He's been introduced to the Heroes and the Villains and the freshly formed Vigilantes (ex-agents and Karl). He's spending more time at the Syndicate's base than his own apartment. Niki is back in her bakery but is also training the Syndicate's people.

Ranboo and Tubbo have been setting up movie nights and Purpled's been teaching him how to count cards and Fundy still gives him more ice cream scoops than he needs. Charlie is a constant brightness in his life and Wilbur always shows him his new songs and Techno has started to spar with him and Phil is there to offer a smile and a hug.

He has a family already - they're standing before him - but now that family is simply getting bigger.

"Oh," he says and George sighs, deeply.

"For a Huntsman, you're not very observant."

"Good," Sapnap speaks before Tommy can. "He doesn't ever have to be a Huntsman again. None of us have to."

"Yeah, fuck you, Gogy," Tommy hisses and Dream leans over, his tea-kettle wheeze filling the apartment.

Tommy pulls Sapnap's hand from his hair, drops Henry and jumps from the bed, swinging his own arm over Sapnap's shoulders. George pats Dream back with a sigh.

"I don't know," Tommy says when Dream can finally breathe again. "I don't think I can just walk away from this."

"Really?" Dream asks, reaching over to tug at the cardigan draped over Tommy. It's big and soft to the touch and Tommy glares at him.

"I will stab you."

"He's like a cute, little, baby bird," Dream coos and Sapnap catches Tommy as he tries to lunge for Dream.

"I think it's nice, Tommy," Sapnap says. "And if you don't think you can let go of this life, you could always do what we're doing."

Sapnap is now Quackity's official bodyguard. Dream and George are trialling being Heroes.

Tommy doesn't have to be the killer he is.

He could be the person that watched over Phil and Techno when Sharp showed up. He could be a bodyguard.

He could be protecting people instead of killing them.

"Hmm," he agrees. "I'll see."

Having the gift of prophecy means the Red Room were never able to catch up with her despite how hard they tried.

She could always slip through the cracks, Callahan at her side.

Until it all goes blank one day.

The normal chatter she's used to tuning out from people's minds falls startlingly silent and the future she's been watching of Dream and his family disappears into nothing.

It's too quiet, too still.

She grabs Callahan's hand, eyes widening and he's frowning, trying to sign something to her but she can barely breathe.

A knock sounds at the door. Her head snaps to the side. Rising slowly with Callahan hovering over her shoulder, she opens the door an inch.

She's met with a very tall, very broad man. He has black eyes with yellow irises and green hair. Beside the man, another man stands, dark hair falling in his face, rings covering his fingers as he fiddles with his shirt.

She knows the green-haired man. She's seen him on the news. Coming to America was a bad idea, especially as she notices more movement: a SWAT team lurking at the end of the hallway of the hotel they're staying in.

The Warden.

The Warden who runs Pandora's Vault.

Pandora's Vault: the prison where all super-powered individuals go if they're deemed too dangerous, where Villains and criminals spend their last days.

"Hello?" She says and the green-haired man cocks his head.

"You've been running for a long time," he speaks, voice a low rumble. The lights flicker and the TV Callahan had been watching turns off. The man next to the Warden flinches. "Don't make this harder for yourselves."

The door is forced open by a trident and Alyssa has no choice but to stumble back into Callahan as the Warden stalks into the room.

Ten minutes later, Callahan and Alyssa sit in the back of a prison van, hands and feet cuffed. The man from earlier sits with them, a sad look to his eyes.

“I’m Spifey,” he introduces, quietly, not meeting their eyes. “It’s easier if you don’t resist. I just do as I’m told.”

“You’re a power dampener,” she breathes and he winces.

He shifts his polo-shirt from his neck and she can see a thin collar around his throat.

“If I don’t, he shocks me,” he says, moving the shirt back to hide the device.

“It doesn’t work on him?” She asks and he sighs, long fingers fiddling with his rings.

“Nothing ever works on him,” he whispers. “Even if it did, I can’t fight him, can I? I just do as I’m told.”

His accent isn’t as crisp as it was at the start of the conversation. She points this out and he rolls his eyes.

“I’m from Russia,” he says, voice still subdued. “I was loaned out. He’s my Handler now. I just do as I’m told. It’d be better for you two if you did the same.”

Alyssa shares a look with Callahan, both of their eyes wide and scared.

No one is coming to save them.

Chapter End Notes

Just some background information that will come in handy later on ;)

(Sam and the Warden are not the same btw)

Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

Healing <3

TW// mental healthy discussion, mention of suicidal thoughts, mention of a failed suicide attempt, past child abuse, past brainwashing, brief mention of past child death, mention of illegal detention, weaponry, injury mention, brief mention of violence, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Michelle tells Tommy to start letting people in, to offer some forms of trust to build on the foundations of his relationships.

He trusts his brothers with his life. He trusts Michelle with his mind. He trusts Phil and Wilbur and Techno with looking after him. That trust shared does not overlap.

He can hear the Room in the back of his mind, remembers the teaching of forbidden friendships well. Red Room agents do not simply let people in, not when every judgement could lead to a knife to the ribs, a bullet to the heart.

But Tommy is trying.

Charlie always listens and Purpled doesn't mind when he rambles and Tommy has to start letting his defences down.

He has to before they crumble.

So he goes to the only place he knows is safe enough to try.

Sitting on a couch, fingers fidgeting with the blanket thrown over the back of the couch, Tommy finds himself grinning at Wilbur as he pauses in the threshold of the living room doorway.

"I didn't hear you come in," he says and then cocks his head. "How did you get in?"

"You're a Villain," Tommy replies. "Work it out, bitch."

"We have CCTV," Wilbur huffs and then pauses. "You dodged the fucking CCTV, didn't you?"

Tommy's grin melts into a smirk. "I'm just that fucking good, Wil. I'm a total badass. You should all fear my power."

Wilbur rolls his eyes, dropping to sit by Tommy but with enough space that Tommy doesn't feel crowded. "Yeah, yeah. I'm so frightened of the child--"

"Who was able to get into your house, undetected, with Phil upstairs," Tommy says, lightly. He wants to mention shooting him, too, ending his life all those weeks ago in Russian snow but Wilbur must see it on his face because his eyes narrow.

"Tommy," he says, seriously. "I will keep saying it for however long you need me to: it wasn't your fault and I'm not angry over it. Even if you- if you don't see me like an older brother, you're practically my little brother, okay? If it's your life or mine, I'm willing to lose mine every time."

The confession, the honesty in those words, makes Tommy want to cry, makes him want to curl into Wilbur's arms and sob.

"I know," he settles on instead, struggling to keep his voice even. "I know it's just--"

He thinks of Michelle, of her delicate words. Tommy has to try. He thinks of Kristin, of the cliff he threw himself off of. Tommy has to take that leap of faith.

"In the Room, even with Dream and George and Sapnap, I didn't feel." He says, quietly, eyes on the blanket under his fingertips. "We were taught how to put all of our thoughts and feelings in a box and shut them out, ignore them. I wasn't a person, I was a spider."

He takes a deep breath. "Then I got out and- and suddenly people aren't marks and they're actually nice. They listen. They offer hugs and support. They hand out trust like it's not something that can be used against you." He looks up, blinks at Wilbur. "You're all weird."

Wilbur snorts. "Thanks. It's a talent, being this strange."

Tommy huffs a laugh, looks back to the blanket. "So when I went back: I was more human than I'd ever been. Killing you should've been easy. It should've been as easy as breathing but--"

But Wilbur listened and held him and made him laugh.

Wilbur offered up his family with a smile and a smirk and Tommy was lured in like a fly to a web.

He takes a deep breath, looks up at Wilbur. "You told me, back on that bench, that you could be patient, that I was your little brother even if I didn't believe it."

"I am possessive when it comes to my things, my people," Wilbur agrees, furrow to his brow.

Tommy swallows. "I do- I do see you as a big brother." Wilbur's eyes widen dramatically, mouth opening like a fish. "I have for some time but I thought- I thought you wouldn't want me after--"

“Toms, can I hug you?” Wilbur asks, desperately and Tommy is nodding, rapidly.

“Please.”

Wilbur pulls him into his arms and Tommy melts against him. There’s an instinctual panic alarm ringing in Tommy’s head: this is Morningstar he’s hugging, a Villain, a criminal, a killer. Yet Tommy ignores it, pushing himself so his arms are locked around Wilbur’s neck.

“I don’t know what love is,” Tommy breathes. “But I know that you make me feel like a person. You make me feel happy.”

He can hear Wilbur swallow as the man hugs him tighter. “I love you, too, Toms,” he whispers and Tommy sniffles.

He’s warm and safe here. He knows that if he asks, or pushes away, Wilbur will let him go. There is no need to fight.

Not that he wants to.

Tommy simply relaxes and quietly asks, “are Phil, Quackity and Sam all fighting each other to adopt me?”

Wilbur laughs, the sound like bells. He doesn’t move an inch. “Yes. Phil is determined to win. Sapnap gave them all a telling off, saying you needed to be the one to decide because you weren’t an object.”

Tommy rolls his eyes, fondly. “Sapnap has always been a fucking Sap.”

“I heard Dream threatened to cut Sam’s fingers off if he hurt you.”

Tommy sighs, fondly. “That green bitch is such a psychopath.”

“As for George…” Wilbur trails off and Tommy laughs, fondly.

“Yeah, he just terrifies everyone. I honestly don’t know how.”

For someone small and slight, George’s aura can come off as hostile and menacing. Tommy still remembers on an early mission with George, the one where Tommy was forced to drive, where people flinched back whenever George walked forward.

Wilbur still hasn’t pulled away and Tommy has yet to move.

Half of his mind is screaming that this will only end in punishment. Affection is forbidden. Friendship leads to complacency and complacency leads to death. Love is for children.

Yet the other half of his mind is soaking in the warmth. It’s as though he’s been yearning for something just out of reach and now, now it’s in the palm of his hand, nestled close.

“Is this the reason you snuck into my house?” Wilbur asks and Tommy shrugs.

“Michelle said I need to start opening up, letting people in.” He grips Wilbur tighter, drops his voice so it’s almost inaudible. “I’m scared.”

Wilbur let’s out a low, punched out noise. “Oh, Toms,” he says. “Being scared is normal.”

“You’re not going to-“ Tommy quietens, thinks of dark, isolated rooms and rough slaps and bruised cheeks and busted lips.

“Never,” Wilbur says, voice more Morningstar’s than his own. “And if anyone- anyone hurts you or threatens you or makes you feel unsafe, I’ll be here, okay? Tech and Phil, too. We’ll try our hardest to make sure you’re safe, okay?”

Tommy can look after himself.

Tommy is a Huntsman Spider. Twenty-eight to two survivors. Twenty-eight to one graduated.

Tommy is an efficient assassin, trained to the highest degree. He can fight and kill and, above all else, survive.

And while he wants to snap at Wilbur, tell him he doesn’t need to be watched over like some child-

It comforts him, knowing someone is always watching his back, looking out for him.

“Thank you,” Tommy replies, resting against Wilbur.

Wilbur shifts them, so that Tommy is curled into his chest, Wilbur dropping his chin atop Tommy’s head. It’s a little awkward, what with their heights, but Tommy doesn’t have much hugging experience to base it of.

It’s good, it’s warm and Tommy is content.

“Can I ask you something?” Wilbur asks, after a few seconds of silence. “You don’t have to answer if you’re uncomfortable but-“

“Wil,” Tommy says with a roll of his eyes. “Ask, bitch.”

Wilbur is silent for a few seconds, chin lifting and arms moving away from the tight hold he previously had. Tommy frowns, panic rising in his throat.

Wilbur is giving him the opportunity to run if he wants.

“Remember when you followed Tubbo and Ranboo back to their house,” Wilbur says, quietly. “And we had a discussion where you were being a fucking feral raccoon?”

Tommy thinks back to sitting in Tubbo and Ranboo’s house, as they tried to explain what Drake and Josh was. It feels like years ago when only a few weeks have passed.

“Yeah?” He breathes and Wilbur hums.

“My ability means I have a form of telepathy - it’s so minimal I normally don’t notice it unless someone is projecting-“

“Yeah, yeah, what, dickhead?” Tommy interrupts. “I have no idea what you’re going on about.”

“I saw you put a loaded gun to your temple and try and pull the trigger,” Wilbur snaps and then freezes.

He falls startlingly silent. Tommy stills.

He remembers that like it was yesterday.

The muzzle pressed to his temple, the sob caught in his throat as his finger rested over the trigger. Never pulling, though. His brain wouldn’t allow him too.

Dream had shown up, not long after, pleading and trying to calm Tommy down before disappearing once again. All because of a power Tommy stole when he killed a man.

“That’s not a question,” Tommy says, voice too even. He doesn’t move from Wilbur’s chest.

“After learning just a fraction of what you’ve been through, I get wanting to but you fight so hard to live,” Wilbur breathes. “Fighting Phil even though one touch could’ve solved that problem-”

“We can’t,” Tommy whispers, clearing his throat. “It’s impossible for us to, you know. Eret’s power and the brainwashing. I tried but I... I couldn’t. As for fighting to live... I guess that’s just instinctual, part of the fucking training, too.”

“I’m really glad you’re alive, Toms,” Wilbur says and Tommy snorts.

“I’m- yeah. I’d say I am too.”

It’s a first step but it’s a good one. A strong one.

It’s the truth, too.

Tommy still can’t sleep much and he jumps at the slightest of sounds. He will forever be plagued by the faces of the people he’s killed, will forever know that parts of his life have been taken away from him because of the Chair.

But Tommy no longer wants to die.

He wants to spend time with Wilbur and his family, wants to annoy Quackity and laugh with Charlie and hang out with Tubbo and Ranboo.

His brothers are alive and Tommy wants to stay by their sides.

“Can I ask you another personal question?” Wilbur asks and Tommy rolls his eyes but nods. “Where’s your nest? In your apartment or somewhere else?”

Tommy blinks up at him, frown tugging at his lips. “Nest? What the fuck is a nest?”

Wilbur’s inquisitive stare turns into one of disbelief. “Your nest? You know, because you’re like a bird?”

Tommy continues to blink at him. “I’m not a fucking bird. I have no idea what the fuck you’re on about, Wil.”

Wilbur stares back and then shouts, “dad!”

Footsteps sound behind Tommy but he doesn’t tense. He’s comfortable here. He knows where the exits are and he’s not closed in. If he wants to leave, no one will stop him.

“Yes?” Phil asks, swinging his head around the doorframe, blue eyes crinkling at the sight of them.

“Tommy doesn’t know what a nest is.” Wilbur states, bluntly, and Phil’s eyebrows snap up, mouth opening.

“I- what?” Phil turns to Tommy, steps into the room, feathers fluffing up in distress.

Defensiveness rises in his throat. “Why are you looking at me like that? So I don’t know what a nest is, fuck off.”

Phil shifts further into the room and asks, gently, too gently, “you don’t have a place in your apartment where you pile blankets up and sleep? A place where it’s soft and comfortable?”

A nervous laugh builds in Tommy’s throat. He starts to pull away from Wilbur. Wilbur let’s him go.

His apartment is warm even with the terrible water pressure but it’s not a home. He doesn’t think he’s ever had one and it’s not like he truly needs one.

So long as he has a safe space to sleep, he’s good.

“Hate to break it to you, Phil, but I don’t really sleep.”

Phil looks even more distraught by that, eyes widening. “Tommy-“ He catches himself, swallows. “Tommy,” he starts again. “Do you feel safe and comfortable and happy in your apartment?”

Tommy tilts his head, confused. “When I’m alone, I know it’s safe to sleep. I’d wake up if I heard anything.”

Because he would. When not watched over by his brothers or the other agents, he will wake up at any sound, sensing movement instantly.

“Tommy, that’s not-“ Phil takes a deep breath. “Come with me.”

With that, he walks from the room and Tommy sends a panicked glance to Wilbur. The man smiles, nudges him to follow after Phil so Tommy, reluctantly goes.

He follows Phil up the stairs, passing the photographs framed on the walls, and to a door that Phil opens. Inside, it's all soft greens with a large bed pushed to the wall, filled with pillows and blankets and discarded hoodies. Tommy blinks at a certain pink one.

"Isn't that Techno's?" He asks and Phil grins.

"He still hasn't noticed," he replies and Tommy finds himself smiling back, even if he's confused as to why he's standing in Phil's bedroom.

He says as much and Phil sighs, sitting atop the bed, wings flexing behind him. "This," he says, throwing his arms wide, gesturing to the room, "is my nest. It's where I feel safe and secure. It's why I have some of the boy's sweaters: it's flock."

Tommy blinks. "Oh," he murmurs, dumbly.

"You've never had the urge to just cuddle up, surrounded by your flock?" Phil asks, tentatively when Tommy continues to look at the bed with big eyes.

Tommy shakes his head, numbly.

In the Room, he was never safe. Each test could be his last and any form of affection, of friendship was discouraged, punished. Even if Tommy wanted to, trying to build a space for himself surrounded by his brothers' things would've got him killed.

It would be seen as Tommy getting too close to the fellow agents. It would be seen as Tommy being weak.

Weakness was beaten out of him a long time ago.

And when he got out, when he was free, he was without his flock. He was alone in an unknown place surrounded by the constant, oppressive fear that death could be lurking around the corner, that the Room could be hunting him.

Tommy has never been safe.

"Oh, Toms," Phil says and Tommy glares, the need to spit and hiss and snap rising in his throat like acid but Phil doesn't look pitying.

He just looks sad.

"How did you cope?" He breathes. "When I got my wings and tried to ignore my instincts, it hurt. I had constant headaches and my wings would ache and I used to get- get so violent when someone tried to touch me or get close."

Tommy looks at Phil and says, honestly, "I always hurt. And I had no choice but to survive."

Phil looks heartbroken. Tommy looks away, resists the impulsive urge to shuffle on his feet.

“You’re always in pain?” Phil asks, voice quiet and Tommy shrugs.

“It comes with the job, big man,” Tommy mutters. “We all heal quick but sometimes we scar or bones heal a little wrong. I’m used to the aches. Can barely feel them anymore.”

The only time he didn’t feel any was in his limbo.

“How long have you been ignoring your needs?” Phil asks and Tommy once again shrugs.

“Didn’t know I had any,” he replies. “There’s a place I go, when everything gets too much. I hide in the forest of my mind and just drift.”

“That’s so not healthy, mate,” Phil says and Tommy snorts.

“When one sign of weakness gets you killed, it’s best to shelve any and all emotion.”

Phil stares at him and Tommy drops his gaze once again. His shoulders shift, wings wanting to snap out and tighten around him. He wants to run his fingers through his primaries and secondaries, the motion self-soothing but he resists the urge.

He feels like he’s done something wrong, like he’s failed somehow. It makes anxiety curl in his stomach, makes panic thrum in his blood.

Tommy can be good. He’s smart and he’s quick and he can be good. His Handler doesn’t need to punish him-

The thought makes him shudder.

Phil isn’t his Handler. He’s safe here. He can leave whenever he wants.

“Would you like me to show you how to build a nest?” Phil asks, interrupting Tommy’s mental anguish and he pauses.

“You’d- you’d do that?” Tommy breathes, looking at him with big eyes. “For me?”

Phil’s face softens. “Of course.”

Twenty minutes later, they’re in Tommy’s apartment and Tommy has finally let his wings snap out.

Phil dumps a few blankets, a couple of pillows, his own green, zip-up hoodie, Techno’s pink hoodie and Wilbur’s yellow sweater that’s speckled with paint, Tubbo’s too-big green shirt and Ranboo’s black and white jacket on Tommy’s bed. The clothes, blankets and pillows join Henry the cow plushie.

“So,” Phil says, spreading the items around to make a place for Tommy’s to sit. “You just move them around until something- well, I guess the best way to explain it is until something clicks in your mind.”

Tommy blinks down at the bed. “But they’re fine like that. Even if it’s gonna be a fucking pain to try and sleep.”

“Toms,” Phil says, gently. “I’m not going to judge you or interfere. Just start arranging things. Trust me, it’s weird the first time but you’re going to be a natural.”

“You’re just old.”

Phil snorts. “Fucking gremlin child,” he says, affectionately.

Tommy slowly gets closer to the bed, wings twitching as he blinks confusedly down at the items. He doesn’t know what to do. Nothing feels right.

It’s like the tests where they never told them what the actual objective was. They either had to guess or work it out.

Tommy always hated those.

But Phil has told him to start moving things and Tommy is going to try because Phil is upset. Tommy has upset Phil with his stupid needs that he doesn’t even feel and-

A noise makes him pause as he starts to shift the clothes and blankets. A low hum. It quietens when he stops and as he pulls Techno’s hoodie up by the pillows, the hum starts again.

It takes him a long moment to realise the hum is coming from him.

He tries to pause again but something inside - something that Tommy knows are instincts he’s been pushing down in the name of survival - builds up and pushes him forward. His hands don’t stop dragging and arranging and pulling items around.

He keeps working, listening to the way discomfort and comfort help to shift the items into something good. Something soft. Something warm.

Only when the hum turns to quiet chirps does he stop.

“Good?” Phil asks and Tommy blinks at the mess of rumpled blankets and pillows stuffed into the corner and Henry amongst Tubbo’s shirt, hiding between blankets.

Tommy swallows, nods. “Yeah.”

Phil reaches out slowly and Tommy lets him run a hand through his hair. A low chirp leaves his throat and Tommy replies with a higher-pitched one. His wings fluff up as he leans into the touch like a lifeline.

Phil quietly laughs but doesn’t pull away.

Tommy doesn’t realise he’s stepping forward until he’s encased in warmth as wings curl around his own, arms holding him to Phil’s chest. He leans his head on Phil’s shoulder and breathes.

“Thank you,” Tommy whispers and Phil squeezes him tighter.

“Don’t thank me yet. You have to be able to sleep in it.”

So Tommy reluctantly pulls away and kicks off his shoes. He doubts he’ll sleep anyway - even if Phil hopes that this nest will work - so he doesn’t bother changing into something lighter than his jeans and jumper.

He crawls into the blanket cavern and his hand finds the gun under his pillow.

“Do you want me to leave?” Phil asks and Tommy shrugs, even if Phil can’t see it as Tommy burrows further in.

“S’fine,” Tommy slurs, eyes drooping and he panics at that.

Has he been drugged? What’s happening? Why does he want to rest so badly?

“Mate,” Phil breathes, a hand suddenly running down Tommy’s wing, soothing the panicked trills leaving his lips. “Just relax. It’s natural to want to sleep when in your nest. I’m here. No one is going to hurt you while you sleep.”

It’s so dangerous to trust Phil like this. Tommy only ever trusts his brothers.

But Phil has been nothing but kind and honest. He’s given them all houses and employment and a family that’s aware of their past and not bothered by it. Phil is good and safe and Tommy-

Tommy does trust him.

So he relaxes into his nest and is surprised when only seconds later, unconsciousness takes him.

Standing before a lone flame, Theseus stands strong. Sapnap is grinning from the sidelines, hand hovering over a lone flame before him. The fire crawls across his hand, over his fingers, burning blue.

“Raise your right hand, palm down,” the teacher says and Theseus does so. “Before you begin, if you remove your hand, you are not fit to be a Huntsman Spider. Understood?”

“Yes, sir,” fifteen boys all say in unison.

The teacher nods. “Hold your palm over the flame.”

They step forward - only a few hesitate - and their palms hover over the open flame. Theseus knows what burns can do to a person, he knows they cannot have any of them purposefully injured.

But this does not matter.

What matters is pushing through the pain.

It starts as a low heat, building to a rising burn that makes many of them cry and shake and whimper. Theseus does not. He is stronger than this.

He is made of marble.

He grits his teeth, locks his arm out in front of him and lets his mind recede into the forest. White noise fills his ears as his hand burns and burns and burns.

He does not know how much time passes as he mentally drifts to stand amongst trees.

All he knows is that when the teacher calls it, when they all stumble back, Sapnap grins at him, smug.

Three are taken away after that.

Theseus survives.

(If Tommy can sometimes feel a phantom itch of fire on his palm, he never mentions it.)

Tommy wakes to the sound of Phil speaking to someone on the phone. Tommy knows the person isn't in his apartment because he would've startled by now.

"No," Phil is saying. "He's fine but you can't come in, not when he trusted me to look after him when he was so vulnerable. I'm not fucking with that tentative trust because you want to take pictures, Wil."

"But, dad," Wilbur groans, voice staticky. "I bet he looks adorable."

"Ah yes, the child assassin is so adorable," Techno drawls, also somewhat staticky.

"And you two think I'm going all bird brain when you're literally camping outside to make sure he's protected." Phil snorts and Tommy draws himself out from his cocoon of blankets.

He's content but still drowsy. He slept without nightmares or memories and he's thankful.

He also has to urge to curl into Phil that he can't ignore, even as part of his mind protests. He is vulnerable right now but he feels safe.

Phil has yet to notice he's up - assassins and their light footfalls - as he stares out of Tommy's windows. It isn't until Tommy face-plants into his back that Phil pauses before spinning in his hold, wings curling around Tommy.

"Hey, mate," he says as Wilbur and Techno immediately start asking if he's okay. "How are you feeling?"

"Weird," he murmurs into Phil's shoulder.

“Clingy?” Phil asks and Tommy hesitates before nodding. “That’s normal, mate. You want to go back to sleep? You only slept for a couple of hours.”

“Best damn sleep of my life,” Tommy replies, words only slightly slurred. He nuzzled closer as Phil makes a low, almost purring sound.

“He sounds so cute, Phil,” Wilbur breathes and Tommy groans. Phil laughs, petting his hair.

“I’m going to stab him,” Tommy says slowly, wings fluttering where they rest against Phil’s.

“Sure, mate,” Phil says, chuckle in his words. “I believe you.”

“Baby bird,” Wilbur coos.

“Do you think he’s faster than you, Phil?” Techno asks as if he’s been pondering it for awhile. “I mean his wings look more like they’re for fast manoeuvres than long distance.”

“Tommy,” Phil says, and Tommy hums, still somewhat drifting. “Do you know how fast you are? You sure do like rooftops.”

Tommy shrugs. “Don’t know. Can’t really fly.”

At that, they both freeze.

Realisation slams into Tommy, knocking the breath from his lungs.

He’s being so open, so vulnerable. Phil is still a Villain and he knows Michelle told him to try but he feels drugged and confused and a low whine builds in his throat as he struggles to release Phil and push him away-

“Breathe,” Phil says, hands and wings retreating, allowing Tommy to put necessary distance between them. “It’s okay. I’m standing over here. Look, nothing is in my hands apart from my phone. You’re okay.”

Tommy shudders, eyes wide and frantic. His wings tighten around him as he gasps from lack of oxygen.

“Tommy?” Phil asks when he can finally breathe without an ache in his chest. “Are you still with me, mate?”

Phil is not a threat.

Tommy knows that realistically.

But right now, all Tommy sees is a threat.

“I can leave?” Phil offers and Tommy shakes his head.

“Just give me a minute,” he hisses out, hands braced on his knees as he gulps in oxygen. He never loses sight of Phil before him.

“Tommy,” Phil says, quietly, calmly. “It’s just me, and Wilbur and Techno are on the phone. They’re not going to come in, okay? You’re safe.”

“But I told you-“ Tommy tries but Phil shakes his head.

“And nothing is going to happen because of that. We can drop the subject completely if you want, mate.” Phil’s own wings flutter behind him. “Or...”

“Or?” Tommy asks, his own wings curling close.

“Or I could teach you to fly?”

Tommy’s wings flap unconsciously. His eyes widen and he tilts his head.

“What?”

Phil’s face is all kinds of reassuring. “I can teach you, if you’d like? Just us if you want. No pressure, mate.”

Tommy’s brain screams that it’s a trap.

He knows what happens when he tells someone a vulnerability. He knows he could lose his wings, he might have made his Handler mad-

That thought stills him.

Phil isn’t his Handler. He doesn’t have a Handler anymore. He’s free.

“You’re not my Handler,” Tommy whispers and Phil’s face drops into agony.

“No, mate. I’m not. No one is.”

Tommy nods, swallows. “You can- you can teach me to fly?”

“Yes,” Phil says. “If you want.”

That’s how Tommy finds himself on the roof of his apartment building, mask covering his face while Phil, Techno and Wilbur stand beside him, also wearing their masks.

“So,” Techno asks. “How much do you know?”

Tommy turns his back to the edge of the building, gives Techno a two-fingered salute and says, “this.”

He then proceeds to falls backwards, off of the rooftop.

Screams and shouts follow him as the wind rushes up to meet him. Tommy is reminded as he falls of the way he jumped from the cliff in limbo.

See, Tommy knows how to fall. He knows that his wings will catch him - like those times on missions when he fell and they saved him from dying - and he knows he will live.

But there's a rush to it as his wings flex wide and after a second of pure adrenaline and his stomach flipping, he flaps and shoots up.

Phil is already in the sky, clearly about to dive after him but Tommy flips him off and then angles himself to the roof.

His landing is all wrong: he trips and stumbles as his wings try to overcompensate. Wilbur grabs him to make him slow down and stop.

"You can fly?" Wilbur breathes and Tommy shakes his head.

"That's all instinct," he replies, panting slightly. "I can't take off, I can't land and when I try to actually fly, I collapse."

"How did you learn about the instincts though?" Phil asks and his voice is deeper, angrier and Tommy sighs.

"Eret... Eret may have pushed me from one of the watchtowers- but look! I'm fine!"

Phil looks up to the sky and sighs. "I'm going to kill them again."

Techno and Wilbur share a look. "We will help," Techno agrees.

"Guys, boys, men!" Tommy says. "I'm alive, okay? And after having a meltdown earlier, I would like to fly. To, you know, stop fucking thinking about it."

Phil looks at him and if Tommy could see his eyes, he'd assume they were softening. "Okay, Toms. First things first: the takeoff--"

Tommy spends a couple of hours on that roof, learning and watching and falling.

He finds that all he needs is a couple of steps to boost himself and he can throw himself high and soar.

Landing is a little awkward until Techno tries to grab him every time he drops. His mind switches instantly - the Huntsman flickering behind his eyes - and he finds that with the incentive, he learns quickly.

After that, Phil says his main problem is by not flying, he's not learnt to build up the muscles necessary to keep him in the air. Supposedly young winged people start by jumping off of high things to get used to their wings. After that they continue until their strength and stamina becomes natural.

Tommy rarely uses his wings - only in emergencies - and Phil clearly worries that Tommy might never have that strength or stamina.

But Phil doesn't know a key detail: twenty-eight to two survivors and one Huntsman Spider.

Tommy has stared in the face of impossibility and has made it possible.

If he needs to, Tommy will fly and fly and fly until he's as comfortable in the sky as he is everywhere else.

After all, to have a place in the world, he must first have no place in the world.

Up there, in the afternoon light, straining muscles and lungs heaving oxygen, Tommy laughs, unfiltered and free.

"Phil," he shouts and the man, flying a little below in case exhaustion causes Tommy to fall, turns his head. "I want to be your bodyguard!"

"You're a child, mate!" Phil yells back and Tommy raises his eyes at the challenge.

He curls his wings up, plummeting to the roof before spanning his wings wide to catch the air. It slows him down enough to zero in on Techno.

He curls his wings up tight, lands on Techno's shoulders and flips him. Plucking the sword from Techno's scabbard, Tommy flips up, a foot on Techno's chest, the point of the sword at Wilbur's neck.

Phil lands and sighs. "Seriously?"

"This is my interview," Tommy says, panting. "I know, like, thirty languages, can infiltrate, assassinate, destabilise. Give me the name of a country and I'll have it in ruins within a fucking week. I'm the shit, Phil."

"This is what you want to do?" Phil asks as the other two continue to stare, frozen in place.

Tommy nods, wings arching high. "No more killing, just protecting. Or at least, killing to save your life instead of killing to assist a corrupt, shitty organisation."

Phil briefly looks to Techno and then Wilbur before settling his gaze back on Tommy. "Then, it would be an honour to have you as a bodyguard. But! You're not being in the forefront, okay? You'll linger in the background so I know you're safe."

Tommy grins, removes his foot from Techno's chest and drops the sword from Wilbur's neck. He hands it over with a cheeky grin.

"You're a little shit, you know that?" Wilbur says as Techno wraps an arm around his shoulder.

"Normally I would threaten you but considering you dropped me quicker than I could think... it's good to have you in our ranks," Techno congratulates and Tommy's grin starts to hurt his cheeks.

"I'm part of the Syndicate now?" Tommy asks and Phil leans over to ruffle his hair.

"Yes, you're officially a Villain now, Toms."

He doesn't think that title would make him feel so good.

It sits in his chest, nestled near his heart, hidden by the protective barrier of his ribs.

It feels like family.

Grian doesn't mean to pause outside of the conference room.

After watching the tapes given to them by a fleeing man - a Huntsman Spider, his mind reminds him - he realised that the children, if alive, would be in their late teens. The two boys and an older girl.

They could be within Philza's assembled army.

Yet scouring the grainy photographs, none of them could find the man that gave the tapes to them in the first place.

Gemini, out in the field, is heading to Brighton to see if he's out there considering that was his plan: grab his son and head there, hopefully start a life for himself.

So Grian was supposed to come over and tell Xisuma.

But he freezes at the sound of a voice that is definitely not Xisuma's.

"Assets found and being placed in containment," a deep voice rumbles. "How did you know where to find them?"

"Some old friends have been hunting them for years," Xisuma replies, voice as controlled as ever. "Normally the woman sees them before they can try anything but with your... Asset, she couldn't see you."

"They're pretty low level Assets," the deep voice says again. "What crime would have them placed in my Vault?"

"You don't need to worry about that," Xisuma replies but the voice - which Grian realises is the Warden considering they're discussing the Vault, Pandora's Vault, the inescapable prison submerged in the sea - huffs.

"Just because I don't have to justify why they're here, doesn't mean I don't personally want to know. That way, I can cater their experience and cell to them."

Xisuma sighs. Grian knows, just knows, he's pinching his nose in frustration. "There are reports that they were working with the defectors. I don't need highly-skilled assassins getting help from someone who can see the future and someone who can plot exactly where their adversaries are."

The Warden hums and Grian's wings tighten around him. Xisuma sounds like he knows about these people already yet no new information has been recovered.

It's unnerving.

It's unsettling.

"When will we move onto phase two?" The Warden asks and Xisuma sighs.

"When we can find where they're keeping the children. Once we have eyes on the children, and when the agents start to wander, we'll strike."

"My Asset will be able to block their abilities," the Warden reassures. "Targeting the Syndicate's leaders will be difficult though, what with the Heroes and Las Nevadas backing them."

"Your brother still isn't answering your calls?" Xisuma asks with a chuckle and the Warden sighs.

"Sam trusts too easily and refuses to acknowledge that the Villains are, well, villains." The Warden releases another sigh. "He'll thank me later when they're off the streets."

"Good luck on building their personalised cells," Xisuma says and Grian shifts away from the door, darting to the end of the corridor.

He takes a deep breath and then walks towards the conference room. It opens as he's three steps away. Xisuma pauses at the sight of him.

"Grian?" He says and Grian smiles, trying to resist the urge to puff up his feathers in fear and confusion.

"Hey!" He greets. "So, Gemini is out searching and Beef found something--"

Grian tries to blissfully ignore the implications.

The Red Room collapsing, Philza taking over, the Warden becoming more active even after the controversies over Pandora's Vault, Xisuma knowing more than he's letting on.

He speaks and he nods and yet-

Yet the nagging in his brain won't shut up.

But the Syndicate aren't answering his calls and Xisuma, along with the rest of the Hermits, are his colleagues and friends.

He ignores the voice screaming for him to dig deeper.

Grian goes back to his work.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm, the Warden is going to be very important ;)

Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

We're nearly at the end lads and I should inform you now: there will be a sequel ;)

TW// mental health discussions, mention of past child abuse, mention of past brainwashing, mention of blood and injury, mention of weaponry, mention of past alcoholism, swearing

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In the Siberian snow, a figure startles awake from the fire engulfing his body. He feels like he's been burnt alive, singed to ash and reborn like this.

The chill lining his back, under his fingertips, is a sweet relief from the fire in his veins.

Something breathes inside of his mind, a whisper that's like bone grinding against bone, like the metallic taste of blood filling a mouth. The whisper is old, older than the ground beneath him. It's ancient and powerful and he shivers at the sound of it.

He goes to open his mouth but nothing happens. He's not in control.

Something else makes him sit up, arms outstretched before him. He finds himself studying his hands as they shift and turn, fingers curling up and then stretching out.

He looks around, blown away by the sight of pure, endless white. Sharp fingernails dig into his palms until blood wells up beneath his greying skin.

Crimson rises as does the sharp spike of pain. The thing inside of him recoils before laughing, the sound like layered screams. Blood drips onto the snow and the thing grins, victorious.

"Yes," he finds himself saying before his entire body shudders. "Oh? Your voice... ours now."

It makes him want to hide in his bones but he cannot move. He's frozen under the control of the thing in his mind.

The voice inside his mind asks a simple question and even if he fears this, he finds himself agreeing. He does, god, does he want to be as powerful as his sister, as powerful as the Angel of Death.

The voice laughs. The screams start to sound the same, start to sound like him.

All at once, he's suddenly back in control of his body. He presses against his forehead where he was shot only to find no bullet wound.

Slowly he stands, not feeling the cold, not shivering. He feels stronger, healthier. Not the sluggish way the alcohol made him.

He goes to turn, to head in the direction of the pulling sensation but the thing inside him stops all his movements. It turns him from the snow, back towards the building.

He walks, body thrumming with energy, to hundreds of graves: all unmarked.

It grins at the sight of a particular grave, one with a blackberry bush atop, and he heads towards it.

He starts to dig through the thorns that prick his skin but do not draw blood. He fights the bramble, pushing the prickles away only for a single drop of blood to fall from the palm of his hand.

Crimson lands on white snow.

The frozen soil seems to ripple under the weight of it.

He reaches down, digging at the snow and ice and earth. He rips and tears until a pale hand shoots through the ground, grabbing his own.

Despite the panic, the confusion, the fear: he pulls.

The ground splinters and crumbles as a girl - young, maybe thirteen - appears like a zombie. Curly brown hair covered in soil, eyes as red as blood, crimson veins at the surface of her washed-out, grey skin.

She blinks at him and the thing inside of him shifts, grins as the blackberry bush behind her withers. It curls away from her, fleeing like a frightened deer as the berries rot and die, the brambles tightening and crumbling to ash.

A thicker part of the bush, curling around the gravestone, remains, hiding the stone from view.

He likes the irony of it: like the girl from the ground, the bush is not so easy to kill.

"Hi," she says, her voice hoarse, sounding like the inside of a coffin. "I'm Hannah."

"Schlatt," he replies, without his choice.

It asks a question in his mind, but the voice is so close to his own, it makes him shiver again. She twitches, nods.

So he's not the only one hearing this.

Schlatt finds his lips pulling into a grin. "Let's go kill a god."

Time flies now they're free.

In August, they celebrate Dream's twenty-seventh birthday. None of the agents mention why Dream doesn't seem as enthused by his birthday as his family is.

None of agents mention how they look between themselves, wondering when their birthdays are, wondering how many they've missed.

September brings a chill and autumn leaves. Tommy fits into place at the Syndicate, he works by their side, scoping out venues and following up on old friends Phil has. He finds that with his nest, he's sleeping more peacefully than ever before.

Michelle both frowns and laughs when he says getting seven hours a night is helpful.

Despite working for the Syndicate, Tommy's days involve spending the morning with Niki, either at her bakery or in the ballet studio. Then he drops in at Las Nevadas, stealing ice cream from Fundy and fighting (playfully) with Punz and Purpled and having his hair ruffled by Charlie.

From there, he ends up either on Tubbo and Ranboo's couch or Phil's and together - including Fundy - do they sit and watch movies and eat dinner.

Tommy spends time with the Heroes too.

Bad hates him for swearing and Ant runs whenever he sees him after Techno helped him acquire a-

("Tommy that spells Slav," Techno drawls, "which you are. Do you mean slave?")

"No, no, no, no!" Tommy pauses as Ant tries to walk away, darting a hand out to grab him. "You're going to be an excellent... friend of ours."

"I don't think I want to be your friend if this is what it means," Ant says, slowly but Tommy just laughs.

"My friend!" He shouts. "Were going to be-"

"What the fuck are you doing?" A voice that is shockingly like Wilbur's has him freezing.

Techno and him share a look. "Ah!" He grins over his shoulder. "Wilbur!")

-friend. With Skeppy, Tommy tries to bet his powers on getting into increasingly more difficult places but Skeppy clearly isn't lying about his abilities.

He already knows Fundy - his ice cream parlour at Las Nevadas, the nights spent at Phil's - and Puffy but he only recently met her children. Dream's siblings.

Foolish is calm and easy to get along with. Drista, on the other hand, is chaotic and powerful and Tommy just bonds with her.

So if Dream finds Tommy dangling from a rope suspended into the sky as Drista flies around dropping random items, well, Tommy is simply having fun.

Then there's Sam. He's kind and warm and Tommy never feels uneasy around him. Tommy grows used to the lingering smell of smoke and the rumble of Sam's voice.

He also grows used to the warm hugs that Sam gives out.

If he wasn't so keen to stay with Phil, Tommy would definitely accept Sam as a pseudo-father.

The children keep up with their deprogramming and ballet and the agents join them occasionally. Tommy watches most days, not wanting the memories of being taught to overwhelm him.

But he does miss the exercise. So when the ballet studio is empty, he grabs his pointe shoes and dances until he's breathless.

Tommy realises, sitting down with Michelle, that he does have a support system. A good one, filled with people who care. Not for any ulterior motives. Not for any nefarious reasons. Just because they care.

October brings a stronger chill and Halloween.

None of the Red Room recruits or agents have ever really participated in Halloween. Not unless it was for a mission.

So the adults go all out.

The children are separated into groups with an adult monitoring them. They're told about trick-and-treating. Costume ideas are thrown around, settled on, brought.

George ends up giving Phil the money back through one of their Swiss bank accounts. Phil gives it right back. He says he has the money to spare.

Phil, Wilbur and Techno go as their Villain counterparts. Jack dresses as the Joker. Niki and Minx match as an angel and a demon. Sean goes as Slade Wilson from the DC comics-

("It's funny because none of you get the joke," he says, bouncing on his heels.

"That you're batshit fucking crazy?" Corpse replies, rolling his eyes. "That ship sailed a long time ago."

"You know," Mark hums as Ethan curls around Corpse. "I knew someone who used to call himself Slade Wilson and then would hum something about a spider man-"

Sean snaps his head around. “Dark?” He whispers and something flickers behind Mark’s eyes. “You’re alive?”

“Wiped out thirty of the lab coats before grabbing Amy and getting the hell out of there,” Mark grins, but there is no warmth there, just a coldness, an emptiness, like a void smiling. “Don’t worry, I didn’t touch your little friend. Strangely enough, he pointed me to the exit.”

Sean swallows, happy face dropping away. “Grey didn’t get out.” Then he grins again, even if all of them can see that it’s fake. “Uh, but it’s fine, because I did! Nearly killed one of them too when I tried to cut his lungs out!”

-and it’s confusing but he seems overjoyed at the prospect.

Corpse is somehow convinced to wear the opposite of his usual attire and so is dressed in a pink suit with bunny ears. Rae and Sykunno end up wheezing together as Tina fixes his ears and Brooke giggles at him.

Tommy is surprised to find out that his brothers have lost a bet when they all show up as cat maids. Quackity and Karl take one look and end up collapsing against each other.

Tommy can’t help but smile at the witches and wizards, the black cats and pirates, the heroes and villains. Something softens inside him, something warms.

“What are you supposed to be?” Wilbur asks, eyeing Tommy’s yellow sweater, dark jeans and curled hair courtesy of Leslie.

Tommy grins, picks up the guitar Sam gave him and starts to strum. “Well, you said to pick someone you want to be, right? So I’m you!”

Wilbur blinks behind his mask and then Tommy is in his arms, being squeezed. Tommy gently places the guitar down so he can pat Wilbur’s back.

“Are you okay?” He asks, nervously. “I didn’t mean to upset you-“

Wilbur pulls back, eyes watery. “You want to be me?”

Tommy frowns at him. “If you keep acting fucking weird I’ll change into my Technoblade-“

“I love you, too, Toms,” Wilbur breathes, hugging him again and Tommy smiles, accepting the hug.

He has yet to say those three words. It doesn’t matter. He doesn’t need to. They all know he does.

Going out is a wild affair. Phil has to remind the children that bringing knives in case someone asks for a trick isn’t a good enough reason but as they walk through L’Manberg, all dressed in varying degrees of costumes, Tommy smiles at the sight.

The deprogramming has been going well and the children can finally be children. They can enjoy sweets and chocolate, they can dress up and be whoever they want without fear of

repercussions.

They're all healing.

It's a warm sight.

It's the start of November when the agents and recruits sit before a large TV and watch the parades.

The Day of People's Unity, held in Russia to commemorate the uprisings and the end of the Time of Troubles.

They listen to the President hold a speech and a few of the non-Russians sit with them to watch.

No one comments on the Russian flags.

Tommy may have had a terrible upbringing that will forever haunt him - and while he may not know if he is truly born and bred Russian - he did grow up in Russia. It will always be his home country.

So they watch and when the day draws to a close with fireworks, they don't speak about it.

The day after is when Phil suggests they get everyone to celebrate Bonfire Night.

"You celebrate nearly blowing your king up?" Ethan asks and Phil laughs.

"It's a celebration that he survived the attempt on his life," Phil corrects. "We set fires and let off fireworks-"

"For the guy that nearly got blown up," Corpse interrupts with raised eyebrows. "How nice of you."

Tommy snorts from under Corpse's arm, Ethan somewhat curled around Corpse. They stand before a large bonfire Sapnap created with Wilbur pointing out what they needed.

Most of the children have sparklers as Sam and Foolish set up the fireworks, Ponk lingering at their sides.

Techno stands with Niki, Jack and Minx as they roast marshmallows while George sits on bench, curled under Dream's arm while they chat with Quackity and Karl. Sapnap stands in front of them, making the flames dance.

Bad has been influencing the flames too, in a more subtle way as he sits with Ant and Skeppy. Fundy has mostly stuck to Wilbur's side, glaring at anyone who mentions his hair looks like the fire.

Tommy had spent at least twenty minutes chasing Drista around while Puffy tried to get them to be careful.

It's chaotic but as the night grows darker and the flames grow higher, Tommy is content to sit here and watch the fire.

Their collective deprogramming has sped up. After a few triggers break, the others quickly follow. The repetition paired with the knowledge that they're safe eases the process.

Not only that, Michelle has said Tommy is improving. He no longer sees authoritative adults as Handlers. With his nest, he's been sleeping for at least six hours a night, sometimes even eight. He's opening up when he feels stressed or overwhelmed and he's helped instead of berated or punished.

It's slow. Tommy still has days where he needs to be alone, when he needs his brothers near him for him to be able to sleep, when the slightest sound has him on edge.

But he's healing.

It feels good.

With the warmth from the bonfire and the laughter of his family, Tommy is whole.

Late November, the Americans among them bring up Thanksgiving.

Tommy has heard of it but has never celebrated the holiday for obvious reasons and ends up sitting next to Wilbur, who loudly explains the history while Puffy carves up the turkey.

"I mean," Wilbur continues as he picks at his food, "it is celebrating the new harvest but also the bloody victory of killing Native Americans--"

"Wilbur," Techno interrupts when Wilbur takes a breath. "What are you thankful for?"

"Family," Wilbur says without a beat, reaching over to ruffle Fundy's hair. "Anyway, as I was saying--"

"Stop messing up my hair," Fundy groans, batting his hand away.

"Aw," Drista grins. "Is the little fox--"

"No," Foolish interrupts, slapping his hand over her mouth. "I'm thankful for this great food."

"What about you, Theseus?" Techno asks. He's starting to call Tommy by his original name - after being given the go-ahead - and Tommy no longer feels like his name is an omen of bad things.

It's just his name.

“What?” Tommy asks around a mouthful of turkey.

Techno rolls his red eyes. “What are you thankful for?”

Tommy pauses to consider this, swallowing. He looks at Corpse, who’s chatting to Ethan with a large smile. Tommy doesn’t think he’s ever seen Corpse smile that brightly before he met Ethan.

Sapnap has Quackity’s hand in his, Karl’s head on his shoulder as he talks to Bad. Dream has his arm around George’s shoulders, even after the man loudly complained about it.

Tommy looks to Sykunno and Rae laughing with Toast, Brooke trying to throw carrots at Corpse, Leslie rolling her eyes as Tina bends George’s cutlery in all the wrong shapes. Mark is there with Amy, his girlfriend, and Sean is informing her rather loudly about how Mark used to constantly talk about her when they were in cells next to each other.

Supposedly, when Sean was loaned out to Mr Beast for experiments to find out how he heals so quickly, Mark had won the games and was experimented on to become Dark. His alter ego, once fully formed, grabbed the nurse who looked after him and disappeared from the Games.

Tommy drags his eyes over Skeppy and Ant talking, pausing on Punz and Purpled catching food in their mouths, grinning at Charlie as he keeps phasing through his fork and knife, rolling his eyes as Ponk feeds Sam. Niki sits next to Jack and Minx, explaining past missions with the other agents adding their own bits and pieces of memories slowly being recovered.

It seems that with the triggers being removed from their minds, without the chair, some memories are returning. They’re normally set off by each other, like Rae remembering Niki after Minx dropped a tea cup.

He looks to Phil, wings out, wrapped around his son’s chairs. He meets Tubbo’s gaze as he talks to Ranboo, Michael on his lap, Shroud next to him.

“This,” he settles on and the table falls quiet. Even the children’s table looks up to him. Phil smiles at him, so soft, and Tommy smiles back. “I’m thankful for all of this, for being free, for being with family.”

Dream’s eyes crinkle and George’s lips quirk and Sapnap flat-out grins at him.

Of course the mood is ruined when Wilbur coos, “aw, Tommy! Little baby bird!”

Tommy immediately tries to stab him and the table erupts into noise once again.

It’s chaotic. It’s family. It’s home.

In Russia, New Years Day comes first before Christmas but in America, Christmas is first and then New Years Day. They don’t bother telling them about the time difference. It won’t matter.

Tommy remembers Christmas in Russia, remembers the feast, remembers helping to serve his Handlers, the guards but not being given any.

So they don't mention Christmas, or the approaching date of New Years.

Not when they will all officially age up.

Not when Tommy will be eighteen.

It isn't until Wilbur takes Tommy Christmas shopping that he realises he's allowed this, they're all allowed this.

Tommy buys random gifts, mostly socks because he doesn't really understand what he should get for people.

When they return, Dream is waiting for him.

"What?" He asks, waving his bags at him.

"We're having three Christmases," he replies in Arabic. They've discovered that Wilbur is now somewhat fluent in Russian, Techno is fluent in Greek and Phil can pick up languages-

("Just because I favour English doesn't mean I can't be prompted to remember the other languages I used to speak," Phil says in Swedish, rolling his eyes.

"You've changed, Philza Minecraft," Tommy replies in Danish. "I don't even know who you are anymore."

Phil laughs as Wilbur blinks between them, Techno huffing. "Any idea?" He asks Wilbur in English and the man shakes his head.

"No." Wilbur glares at them. "I need to download duolingo.")

-at the drop of a hat.

Tommy frowns as Wilbur lingers. "And?"

"Is it-" Dream pauses, running a hand through his hair. "Are we going to have to watch them celebrate?"

Tommy considers this but shakes his head, holding the bags up once again. "We're people," he reminds him, quietly. "We're not Spiders here."

Tommy is proven right when Christmas Eve rolls around. They have a tree up in the Syndicate's base and in their houses.

(Tommy has been spending more time at Tubbo's and Ranboo's house. He says it's because it's warmer. No one calls him out on his obvious lie.)

Lights decorate their houses and snow has begun to fall. Foolish merely laughs it off whenever anyone asks about the change. Sykunno does the same, even as his fingertips create dancing snowflakes.

Tommy cannot escape Mariah Carey's voice and he's eaten more food than he thinks is possible.

They tell the children about Santa Claus, even if all of them have seen too much horror to believe in a big, fat man with a long, white beard from the North Pole.

This will be the first Christmas Tommy has celebrated.

This will be the first Christmas for all of them.

Christmas Eve is spent watching Christmas movies and curled up under Techno's arm. Tommy falls asleep there, content with the knowledge that he is safe and protected and loved.

He only wakes when Wilbur shuffles and he opens his eyes to meet Phil's as he throws blankets over them.

"You okay, mate?" He asks and then pauses, to look over at the clock on the mantelpiece. "Oh. Merry Christmas, Tommy."

"Merry Christmas, big man," Tommy replies and nods. A yawn leaves his lips and Phil laughs, quietly, adding another blanket over Tubbo and Ranboo.

"Sleep," Phil says.

"M not tired," Tommy replies and Phil rolls his eyes.

"If you sleep, I'll give you the photo of Fundy hugging Wilbur's legs."

"Deal." Tommy turns back to using Techno's arm as a pillow and sleeps until six.

It's a habit they're all having trouble breaking. Tommy may be sleeping peacefully but all of the Red Room survivors still end up waking at six.

He removes Techno's arm, and Wilbur's bony chin from his shoulder. He throws the blanket off and steps over Tubbo and Ranboo, grinning at where Fundy is curled against Wilbur's legs.

Phil already has the coffee on, still in his owl pyjamas and smirks at Tommy. "Want to give the others a heart attack?"

"Philza Minecraft, have I ever told you that you're the only man I respect?"

After blaring out Michael Bublé, they open the presents under the tree.

Tommy collects a cow sweater and cow socks. He gets another burner phone, an ornate dagger and about thirty cans of coke.

He gives Wilbur a blue sweater, Phil a mug that says 'World's Greatest Bird Dad' in big, block letters, and Techno gets an ornate axe. For Tubbo, he gives him a bee mug with matching bee socks and Ranboo gets a slender man mug with matching socks. Fundy gets his own Hero merchandise of a pair of socks with his fox on them.

Tommy doesn't really understand why Phil nearly cries or why he gets tackled into a hug. All of these gifts are basic in his opinion - he still doesn't truly grasp the idea of gift-giving.

Once the gifts have been received and they've eaten a hearty English breakfast, they briefly head over to the cemetery.

Tommy doesn't understand why until Wilbur and Fundy stand before a headstone with Sally Minecraft written on it.

"Mum," Fundy says, tears in his eyes. "Merry Christmas. I miss you."

Wilbur swallows, grips the back of Fundy's neck. "Merry Christmas, darling. So much has happened. I've got another little brother." Wilbur meets Tommy's eyes as Fundy places flowers on the grave. "You would've liked him."

Fundy rests his head against the headstone before stalking off, Phil and Techno hot on his heels after they too wish the dead woman a Merry Christmas. Tubbo and Ranboo also say their piece before following after. Tommy watches as Fundy grips onto Phil while leaning into Ranboo.

Tommy goes to follow - he does not know this woman and he does not mourn, even if Michelle comments on how unhealthy that is - but Wilbur stops him.

"How do you get over it?" He asks, voice small. "All of the death."

Tommy thinks about it, the nights spent seeing the faces of his ex-classmates, the faces of the people he's killed. "You don't," he replies. "You just have to learn to live with it. There will always be death. That doesn't mean it has to consume you."

Wilbur sniffs and meets Tommy's eyes. With the white in their hair, they do look like two brothers. "Tommy saying something deep? Who are you and what have you done with my brother?"

Tommy snorts, claps him on the shoulder. "Fuck off, bitch." More softly, he says, "whatever happened, you're strong, I believe in you."

"She was murdered when Fundy was twelve," Wilbur says, fingers brushing the headstone. In the stone, a ring sits and Tommy only just notices an identical ring around Wilbur's finger. Wilbur sees him looking. "I don't want to lose it so I don't wear it. As for her murderer, Phil couldn't find the killer."

Tommy hums. "I could look into it if you want? From one killer to another."

Wilbur smiles at him, ruffles his hair. “Yeah. Maybe. I’ll think about it. Thank you, Toms.”

“Well,” Tommy looks at the headstone. “Anything for Wilbur’s love. It was lovely to speak to you, Mrs Minecraft.”

Wilbur smiles at him before looking back to the headstone. “I miss you, too, Sal. Sleep well, darling.”

From the cemetery, they head over to the Heroes Tower.

Dream and George have already started to help with Christmas dinner, including their own food ideas from when they would help with the Russian feast.

This time, they’ll also get to eat the food.

Soon after they arrive, the Las Nevadas group show up with the children. It’s chaotic as dinner is set around a giant table that curves around the room.

They eat and they drink and they hold silly speeches while wearing the paper hats won from the Christmas crackers.

They share presents and Tommy gets hugged until his ribs hurt when he gives Sam his present of a mug that says ‘This is what an Awesome Dad looks like’ with arrows pointing upwards.

Once dinner and dessert have been eaten, more presents handed out, they all head over to Las Nevadas.

Tommy gives Charlie a hoodie that’s bright green and says ‘Goopy Boy’ that makes Charlie laugh until he almost cries. Quackity does tear up when Tommy gives him a mug that says ‘Dad Duck’ with a duck in the middle, followed by more text underneath that says ‘Quack Quack Quack’.

Fireworks are released and they eat the most expensive food possible while carols and Christmas songs are sung around the fake Eiffel Tower. It’s lit up with bright red and green lights and Tommy stands with his brothers and grins at the sky.

Sapnap has been wearing a ring on his ring finger, matching Karl and Quackity. It’s adorable, even when Dream puts on his puppy dog eyes and George pushes his face away as he blushes red.

As the night draws in and snow falls into their hair - the children are making snow angels and snowmen while the adults partake in an intense snowball fight - Dream pulls the four of them aside.

“When I first got out,” he says, “and when I was forced back, I never forgot my taste of freedom. Now, I’ve been trying to find Alyssa and Callahan so that they can join us but they seem to have disappeared. I hoped they could see us again now we’re free.”

“Maybe they’re back in Budapest?” Sapnap questions and Dream shrugs.

“Maybe. I’ll see in the new year, but for now, I will have to do this without them.” Dream looks at them, green eyes burning with warmth. “You’re all my family and I know doing gift-giving is a little strange for us but I wanted to try. So, here.”

Dream reaches into his pocket and then opens his hand.

Four rings sit in the palm of his hand. The silver band is thick and when Tommy looks at them, he can see a faint indent.

“‘Till the end of the line,” Dream breathes. “We’re going to live longer than everyone else but our lives are still dangerous. We’ll be family, we’ll be together until the end of that line, until our luck runs out. Even after that.”

Tommy is the first one to accept a ring and slot it over his thumb. Then Sapnap. Then George. Then Dream. All of the rings fit comfortably and George smiles at him.

“You’ve been planning this for a long time, haven’t you?”

Dream smiles back. “Puffy helped me find a guy to make them.”

Tommy spends a second staring at the metal before throwing himself at Dream. His brother catches him and holds him as a too-warm body curls around him and then a cold hand grips the back of his neck.

“I’m with you,” Dream says, quietly, honestly. “‘Till the end of the line.”

“And you all say I’m the sap,” Sapnap whispers and Tommy laughs as he sniffles.

His brothers are here and they’re celebrating Christmas and they’re free. They’re people.

Boxing Day is spent, curled with his brothers amongst the rest of his family, watching random films and eating until he wants to be sick.

Tommy has never had a home before.

Tommy has one now.

New Years Eve makes all of the past Red Room operatives uneasy. The eve of their collective birthday.

Tommy will be eighteen.

So while Las Nevadas goes all out with fireworks and entertainers and a large ticking clock attached to the fake Eiffel Tower: they are all subdued.

George is older than twenty-four. Sapnap is older than twenty. Dream is twenty-seven. Tommy is eighteen.

Tommy tells Michelle, at their last appointment before the new year. She listens and nods along, pausing to think.

“You lost time,” she says, finally. “But you are still Tommy. You will be Tommy even if you are sixteen, seventeen, eighteen or nineteen. I’m sure it’s terrifying to be missing so much time, and I’m proud of you for telling me, but your past is unchanging, it’s fixed. Today and tomorrow and the day after are unsure. You’re constantly making memories, writing over the old trauma. The future is bright if you stop lingering in the shadows of your past.”

Tommy is confused but as he stands next to Phil, their wings brushing, he realises that Phil is as frozen in time as he is. So is Wilbur and Techno. Tubbo and Ranboo will be too when they wish to be reapers.

Yet they are not plagued by their past, their history. They take each day as it comes, learning and growing as individuals.

When the timer ticks down and lands on zero, when the fireworks explode and the couples embrace and kiss, Tommy laughs alongside his family.

He is eighteen. He’s an adult. He’s a survivor of the Red Room.

He’s the Huntsman Spider but he’s more.

He’s Life and as he thinks of that, his veins glow golden.

He’s made it this far and he’s gained more friends and family than he could ever imagine.

“Happy New Year!” He shouts with the rest of them and laughs.

Tommy is no longer a spider. Nor is he a bird confined to a cage.

“New Year’s wish?” Phil asks and Tommy grins at him.

“To be as happy as I am now for the rest of time.”

Kristin shakily awakens, engulfed in red.

She looks around, rising to her feet. Everywhere she looks it’s red. The ground beneath her feet shifts and moves and when she studies the walls, it appears to be vines, curled and interlocked with other red vines

“Old friend,” she says, swallowing. “What is the meaning of this?”

A voice older than she is replies, the sound like layered screams, like the rolling of waves on the ocean, like maggots writhing on an open wound.

She shivers, shudders. “There is a new Life,” she replies, carefully. “You are not needed.”

The voice hisses back and she blinks at the cold tone. It's angry and annoyed and she's shocked by the animosity aimed at her.

When they last spoke, there was no such tension, no such pain. They were friends.

After all, there must be an end to even the Gods, a clean-up crew of all existence. There will be a time in the future when the sun burns up and the earth crumbles and she's not needed. Only then, when her body turns to dust, will the energy be engulfed and a new God will be created.

Energy cannot be created or destroyed.

Even a God's energy.

Decomposers play an important role in harvesting that energy and converting it into something better, newer.

Clara and her were not the first Gods.

Tommy and her will not be the last.

"I am aware of my sister's death," Kristin reminds the voice, albeit a little angrily. "I witnessed her pass. But her power was absorbed, it was not lost. There is no need for your... your apocalypse to destroy this earth. It is not in ruin. It is healing."

The voice replies, shortly. She narrows her eyes.

"There is another Life," she repeats, hotly. "You are not needed to clean up any mess. Clara's energy is--"

The voice snaps and she stills as the screams grow to a terrifying degree. She closes her eyes, tries to find the doorway between realms she usually can walk through to get from earth to limbo.

She cannot sense any door.

Her eyes snap open. "You've drained me," she accuses and the voice laughs.

She tries again, using every ounce of her power to find the doorway, or a way to connect to her husband or sons.

Nothing happens.

She snarls and the voice speaks in a lulling, chilling tone.

"He's stronger than you think," she replies when the voice starts to retreat. "He's been surviving his entire life. He will fight you and something tells me he will win."

The voice says one last, simple phrase before she's left alone in her own, red limbo.

She knows the voice is right: Tommy only has the power of Life if people believe in him.

Gods survive off of belief and without it, they can bleed and they can die. Tommy cannot win against a being older than time, as old as the first Gods, not a being who's drained her of her energy.

Still, as Kristin sits in this cage, if anyone can fight the impossible and survive, it's Tommy.

Before the red once again engulfs her, she spends her last seconds awake to send every ounce of belief towards him.

Tommy must survive and win or the entire world will be destroyed and remade.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo,, that's why Mumza hasn't been around ;)

Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

This is the end! If you look at the end notes there will be a link to the sequel ;)

TW// mental health discussions, mention of past in the Red Room

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The field spans out for what looks like miles and Tommy follows as Tubbo flies over the gate, rapidly chatting about the different species of flowers while Ranboo easily climbs over after him. Unlike Tommy, who's silently listening, Ranboo responds with quiet agreements to whatever Tubbo says.

Tommy follows at a slower pace, standing on the brick wall and looking out at the endless grass before him.

His wings flutter in the light breeze and sometimes it catches him by surprise that he's here. That he's alive and with his friends and his brothers are out and-

And he's free.

He is free.

He breathes in the air and jumps from the brick, shoes hitting soft grass as Tubbo races across the field, heading straight for the wildflowers. Tommy watches him go, Ranboo following with his long strides as a few cows look up at the noise.

The cows have noticed Tommy and he knows that statistically they're dangerous but he's the most dangerous creature here.

At least, he thinks he is.

He doesn't feel like a monster much these days.

The therapy paired with Phil's doting behaviour and his brothers smiling more have shown Tommy that healing is possible. He's seen Niki's bakery, he knows it's possible even it feels like sometimes it's not.

Some days, there is a horrid ache to be back there in the Room, to let someone else have control over his life when it seems too hard to even feed himself.

But George is laughing and Sapnap is constantly pulling people into hugs and Dream is smiling so wide his cheeks must be hurting. His brothers are more human than Huntsman Spiders now. The ring on his thumb, matching theirs, proves that.

It feels good. It feels better than good.

That's very evident when he begins to walk slowly after his friends and finds flowers sprouting up beneath his shoes. They're bright and colourful and Tommy smiles down at them.

He is Life, as much as it shocks him to think about. He only recently found out that when he's happy, plants grow.

It reminds him of Hannah and the pain there lingers.

But she is gone and he is here.

He's trying to not let his past define him. He is looking for those brighter, better days in his future.

His chest doesn't tighten uncomfortably anymore, his hands don't shake as often. He's settling in his skin.

Not as Five. Not as Huntsman Spider. Not as weapon.

He is Tommy.

The cows plod closer and Tommy extends a hand, wings flexing out before curling closer. One brave cow nudges his outstretched palm and within a minute, he's surrounded by them, all giving him gentle brushes of their noses.

"Hey," he says, smiling at him. "What are your names?"

Almost instantly, he hears faint murmurs that he's yet to fully understand.

With his memories coming back, he remembers killing a man and then being able to communicate with animals at a very basic level. Less speech and more intent.

It seems as Life, he's gaining some abilities long-forgotten back. No more use it or lose it. It's as if he never lost it in the first place.

He does wonder why he can't feel emotions or why the plants seem to be linked to being Life and not Hannah. He doesn't linger on that thought though.

Not when the cows are pushing at his hands. He can't wait for when he can actually talk to animals. His conversations with Anchor are hopefully going to be less one-sided.

The brave one nudges him again and Tommy falls back, laughing as he ends up sprawled on the ground. Responding to his joy, more flowers pop up underneath his crushed wings as the cows all flop down beside him.

He ends up with the brave one's head lightly resting over his torso and he holds their head delicately, grinning as tears form in the corner of his eyes.

He is free.

He's actually free and he he's actually happy.

It feels invigorating.

He laughs as the tears fall from his eyes, flowers curling up his limbs.

In the distance, he can hear Tubbo's faint laughing and the sound of Ranboo's low drawl. He knows that soon, Tubbo will flutter over to make sure he's okay and as the light dims, Ranboo will start to nudge them back towards the house.

He'll return to Phil's chirps and Techno's red eyes and Wilbur's grin at the state of his grass-stained shirt. His brothers will ask how he's been and he won't have to lie.

Tommy is happy and he's free.

Staring up at the blue sky, flowers spanning around him and the brave cow's head in his lap, Tommy grins victoriously. To sit quietly amongst the flowers is happiness.

He lets out a low whistle.

Seconds later, two more whistles respond to his own. It's something George suggested, what with them not living in each other's pockets anymore.

Now, they all have a whistle so that they can always find each other.

Tommy is a survivor.

Twenty-eight to two survivors. Twenty-eight to one graduated.

Tommy is a Huntsman Spider.

He's Life. Even if he's yet to truly feel it. He's still learning and growing.

And yet, surrounded by his family and friends, he doesn't need to be any of that. He doesn't need to be brave or strong or emotionless.

He can be loud and annoying and him.

He doesn't need to be a survivor, a Huntsman Spider, Life.

He just needs to be Tommy.

That will always be enough.

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR BEING HERE AND READING!!

Here's the link to the sequel:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/34573507/chapters/86061400>

Thank you again! It's been a wild ride ;)

Bonus Chapter

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!

This is a short bonus chapter because this fic has reached 200,000 hits and 6900 kudos and I want to say Thank You to all of you!!!

So thank you for reading this and if you want more, there is a sequel: Come in from the Cold, Huntsman - <https://archiveofourown.org/works/34573507>

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What are you doing?” Tommy asks, resting against the doorway as Wilbur and Techno tug blankets and pillows down from upstairs.

Tommy tries to see if any of the items are from Phil’s nest or if they have these hidden away somewhere. It makes Tommy more than a little curious and he wonders if he’s missed a celebration of some kind.

“Sleepover.” Tubbo comments, shifting the couches back so that the whole living room floor is uncovered. Ranboo helps to move the coffee table into a corner.

Wilbur and Techno then dump the blankets and pillows on the floor before disappearing back upstairs. Tubbo and Ranboo are quick to move everything around into a large, comfy-looking pile.

Tommy’s wings flutter at the thought of making another nest. He curses his bird brain.

Tommy watches for a little while longer and then says, “I’ve never been to a sleepover.”

He’s heard about them. The Room showed them American films depicting them but Tommy has never lived them.

Why would he? He lived in a dorm up until he escaped and his missions never had him sleeping over at a mark’s house. He was better at stealth missions: go in, kill whoever, and leave without any trace left behind.

The whole house seems to pause. Tommy’s wings curl tight against his back in shame. He ducks his head and resists the urge to fidget.

“You’ve never...” Phil breathes, head poking out from the kitchen.

Tommy swallows, shrugs, doesn't make eye contact. "I've seen films and shit. Like nail painting and pillow fights and talking at three in the morning."

When he does lift his gaze from the carpeted floor, Phil's eyes are full of sadness. They're all aware of how the agents had their childhood ripped from them.

There was no such thing as innocence in the Red Room.

The innocence in them died quickly if they wanted to survive.

Tommy has never really been a child. He's been a tool, a carefully crafted weapon but not a child. Any form of childish desire and want was forbidden in the Room.

"Well then," Wilbur says, clapping his hands. "Let's make this sleepover the best you could have."

Which is how Tommy finds himself perched on the arm of the couch as Phil preens his wings while the others add to the growing pile of comfort. There is a pizza in the oven and Tubbo is working on slushies while Ranboo flicks through Netflix. To no one's surprise, Tommy hasn't seen a lot of what's on there.

He has been educating himself but a lot of horror films are boring, thriller films are unrealistic, indie films are confusing and romance films make him gag. It's a little awkward to admit he likes documentaries.

Tommy's mind drifts when Niki and Jack appear, a tray of cupcakes Niki has baked in their hands. He doesn't think he'll ever get tired of Niki's presence and he will admit that he does see her a sister.

It's easy to feel calm here, to feel safe.

There are no expectations, no need to perform or act. No one here will judge him if he needs a minute or needs attention. It's definitely a strange feeling, one Tommy has started to feel in the latest weeks.

He's happy.

Isn't that bizarre?

He was always taught that those types of emotions were bad, were dangerous. The children who were nice and sweet didn't survive. They died early on, or were broken until only the shell was left behind.

Tommy was smarter than the others. He didn't get attached to the boys in his class. He did what he had to do to get out of there. Killing his classmates, pushing through the pain of training, leaving his brothers behind: he did those things in the name of survival but they will always haunt him. They will remain in his brain, branded forever.

He got out, yes. He saved the younger children, saved the agents, yes. But at what cost?

Yet here, with Phil brushing through wayward feathers and Wilbur humming under his breath as Techno sprawls across bright pink pillows, Tommy feels content.

He's happy.

So they eat pizza and Niki paints his nails a dark black and Jack, Tubbo and Ranboo play Uno while Phil, Wilbur and Techno end up debating a history documentary. Tommy feels warm and relaxed.

There's no inner Huntsman Spider panicking about possible safety issues. If someone were to attack them right now, Tommy is surrounded by some of the strongest people he knows. He is protected here, he's safe.

Tubbo suggests they watch Up. Tommy allows himself to enjoy the film with childish glee, in awe of the bright colours and storyline of loss and freedom and adventure.

He doesn't have to watch this and memorise the script, accents and tones. He doesn't have to learn something to report to his Handler. He doesn't have to repeat what's happening back to a superior.

He can simply watch and exist.

It's a soothing feeling.

When the night draws in and Tommy has eaten more sweets than he ever has in his entire life, he curls up next to Wilbur on his stomach. Two, giant red wings span across Wilbur and Niki, on one side and Tubbo and Ranboo on the other. His primaries brush Techno where he's refusing to move from his pink pile. It's a protective gesture, almost a possessive one and Phil snorts when he sees it as pride burns in his chest.

That's a truly avian instinct, one that Tommy has probably been repressing. Phil's so incredibly proud of him, especially when he knows what that gesture means.

Tommy sees them as family.

As Tommy drifts to sleep - it shocks him, that he can have this, can sleep around these people because he trusts them, god, he trusts them and that thought is both terrifying and exhilarating - he thinks he needs to tell the agents about this.

He wants to have a sleepover with his brothers.

He thinks it would make them as happy as he is right now.

Seriously, thank you all and I'm glad you enjoyed reading this because I enjoyed writing it <3

End Notes

Thoughts? Thoughts?

My discord: <https://discord.gg/qTWq34FF2a>

My Tumblr: @spookyserpent

My Twitter: @spooky_serpent

^ I'll be posting some preview, no context spoilers for new chapters on my Twitter ;)

If you want to make art or write something based on this fic you have full permission to do it!

I really need to stop thinking about Black Widow but I can't :')

Your comments, kudos and interactions are very welcome!

Take care of yourselves!! <3

Works inspired by this one

[I Pack a Little Pistol \(In my Pistol Belt\)](#) by [emprismos \(orphan_account\)](#)

[Restricted Work] by [rabbit_with_a_sword](#)

[Primordial](#) by [bugbbear](#)

[Restricted Work] by [rabbit_with_a_sword](#)

[Restricted Work] by [Giacarem](#)

[The Dog Days \(are over\)](#) by [orphan_account](#)

[Numb Little Bug, That's Gotta Survive](#) by [ServerNotFound](#)

[Keep your hands at the level of your Eyes](#) by [peie3](#)

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[Let the Blood Get Thinner in the Veins \(but not in the heart\)](#) by [bewiitched](#)

[You know it takes a lot to move me \(if you figure it out tell me\)](#) by [orphan_account](#)

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[me and the devil \[walking side by side\]](#) by [kovacsbackpack](#)

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